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Writing HERstory: Examining the Intersectional Identities of Black Women in Educational Leadership

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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, WRITING HERSTORY: EXAMINING THE INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES OF BLACK WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP, by NATASHA N. JOHNSON, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Education, in the College of Education & Human Development, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

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Writing HERstory:

Examining the Intersectional Identities of Black Women in Educational Leadership

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Under the Direction of Janice B. Fournillier, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

There is growing research pointing to the universal, collective identity of black women in the United States. While this is promising, there remains, historically, an underrepresentation of black women in and en route to the highest levels of organizational leadership. The divide is even more amplified in the field of education, a sphere in which women are largely represented as a whole. This is particularly relevant for black women considering the incongruence that lies between their heightened levels of educational attainment as compared to their generally lower status in the organizational pecking order. In the effort to advance both theory and research development in this domain, critical race feminism and social justice leadership theory serve as the frameworks for this study. Qualitative in nature, this work explored the relived experiences of four black women who serve as executives, directors, and CEOs within the realm of education. This study employed the tenets of hermeneutic phenomenology in the effort to understand and investigate the cultures in which these women lead, and the intersecting factors – including race, gender, and class – that impact these women's ability and capability to perform within the educational sector. Using in-depth, timed, semi-structured interviews, study members were invited to reflect upon and share their experiences and perceptions as women, as women of color, as educators, and as educational leaders. Participants' recounted stories of resilience, community, struggle, and perseverance reveal copious insights regarding the extensiveness of each participant's leadership journey. Results indicate that inequities remain within the educational leadership sphere. The information shared and the resulting data collected revealed the necessity for equitable and inclusive leadership cultures. Indeed, there seems to be the need to educate and raise awareness about the impact of leadership cultures on black women, their experiences, and the personal and professional choices they make. In addition, the field can benefit from the establishment of more research studies related to the development and advancement of black women in the context of educational leadership.

INDEX WORDS: Critical Race Feminism, Social Justice Leadership, Intersectionality, Equity, Hermeneutic Cycle, Phenomenology

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in

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in

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to:

- My phenomenal study participants. Thank you for sharing of yourselves, and thank you for your continued commitment to the furthering of this work. I appreciate your service, and I am eternally grateful to you for your readiness and willingness to serve as contributory members of this study.
- Every first-generation American, who, like myself, has had to learn how to navigate, understand, deal with, and succeed in a world that can oftentimes be very challenging.
- Every young black girl who has ever had to wrestle with matters of identity, intersectionality, and self-development.
- Every person who has or is growing up in a single parent household. Neither your past nor present is indicative of your future. You cannot change where you came from, but you can (and should) have a hand in determining where you are headed.
- All current and burgeoning leaders engaged in the 'struggle' for equity and the 'fight' for justice. Thank you for answering the call. As long as there is a 'struggle' and/or 'fight' to be had, your presence is necessary.
- All of you who remain unsatisfied with mediocrity. Everyone agrees that 'someone' should do 'something' to spark and initiate change, but the harvest remains ripe while the laborers remain few. To you, I say, keep on championing justice. It is the right thing to do.
- Everyone who is currently considering undertaking the doctoral journey. Do it. As one who has 'been there' and 'done that', let me tell you – the attainment of the doctorate is worth all – and I do mean all – of the sacrifice. It will offer you the opportunity to write your own ticket. Trust me. That alone makes the journey worth it!

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INTRODUCTION

Although men in leadership positions have been studied rather extensively, women have been historically neglected in this area of research and theory development (Chemers, 1997; DeWitt, 2016; Hill, Miller, Benson, & Handley, 2016). For much of recorded history, women were generally excluded from positions of leadership (Beard, 1915, 2000; Goethals & Hoyt, 2017; Reagle & Rhue, 2011). A comprehensive review of encyclopedia entries published just after the turn of the twentieth century resulted in a list of less than 900 prominent women throughout the course of the last 2,000 years (Beard, 1915, 2000; Kellerman, Rhode, & O'Connor, 2007). In rank order, they included queens, politicians, mothers, mistresses, wives, beauties, religious figures, and 'women of tragic fate' (Karin, 1996; Rhode, 2014, 2017). Only a marginal number actually acquired these positions of leadership in their own right. The majority of these women exercised influence in some manner through their relationships with men in power (Lennon, Spotts, & Mitchell, 2013; Rhode, 2017).

The power scales are rebalancing right before our very eyes (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010; Longman & Madsen, 2014). In this post-modernist society, shifting the paradigm (Ransdell, 1991) consists of a more advanced and intellectual discourse, one in which all members of this democracy are viewed as valued participants in this discussion. Shifting the single-track leadership archetype means investigating the origins of inequity, the preservation and duplication of imbalanced systems, the social consequences of stratification, and the ever-changing systems of inequality (Betters-Reed & Moore, 1995). The pertinent conversations regarding this – intersectionality, equity, and leadership cultures – are matters in which current and future generations must all be included.

In light of this, the primary purpose of this study is to examine the re-experienced accounts of four black women in top-level leadership positions in the U.S.[1] educational sphere. More specifically, the unique obstacles and successes that these women might have faced will be discussed along with the impact of gender and race on their leadership experiences. The overall research question guiding this work is:

> *How have the racial and gender identities of black women informed their educational and professional experiences in and on the path to leadership?*

This open-ended question is intentionally designed to speak to the heart of the following phenomena: 1) the intersecting identities of four black women in top-level positions within the educational leadership realm and 2) the complexities of these women's experiences as they navigated their leadership paths.

I argue that it is important to acknowledge the great gains that have been made regarding the participation of women in society, in politics, in education, and in employment. Yet, the representation of women in positions of power and influence has been conspicuously less progressive (Harper, 2018; Slaughter, 2015). Certainly, there is an increasing number of women who do manage to break through the glass ceiling to occupy top-level leadership positions (Chemers, 1997; Eagly & Carli, 2007). However, research suggests that these successful women are likely to be disproportionately represented in positions of leadership, a phenomenon referred to as the glass cliff (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Gipson, Pfaff, Mendelsohn, Catenacci, & Burke, 2017; Ryan et al., 2016; Sabharwal, 2013). In sum, although developments continue to be made, only very recently has significant advancement been made in what remains a historically and characteristically male-dominated space (Kellerman et al., 2007; Kulik & Metz, 2015).

[1] Throughout this paper, U.S., United States, United States of America, and America are used interchangeably.

Scholars continue to question whether there is an implicit quota on women in leadership positions, given the present domain of influence (Dezső, Ross, & Uribe, 2016; Lennon et al., 2013; Reagle & Rhue, 2011). According to Yukl (2009), women comprise over half of the labor force and currently predominate in mid- to lower-level managerial ranks. Yet, they are only marginally represented at the executive levels (Hill et al., 2016; Yukl, 2009). Notwithstanding all of this, women continue to provide a significant pool of potential leaders (Prime, Carter, & Welbourne, 2009). Indeed, there is a growing body of scholarship which suggests that women are highly suited for more advanced leadership positions in every job sector (Richardson & Loubier, 2008; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

It is important to note that for women of color, this exclusion, also known as the 'leadership divide', is even more pronounced (Evans, 2008; Prime et al., 2009; Richardson & Loubier, 2008). This is especially relevant to and for black women, considering their status as the most qualified group in terms of educational attainment (Davidson & Burke, 2000; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010). Despite this accomplishment, they remain, as a collective, at the bottom half of the organizational hierarchy (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Within the educational realm, this discrepancy is even more dichotomous, in that while women reflect roughly 75 percent of the workforce, they represent a paltry less than 20 percent of those at the highest levels of leadership (DeWitt, 2016; Gupton, 2009).

Of great significance to this work is the claim that within the field of education, this includes the increased capability of women, and women of color in particular, to serve in leadership capacities (Gupton, 2009; Hill et al., 2016; Prime et al., 2009). Therefore, considering the remnant and pervasive imbalances that exist (Helm, 2016; Reeves & Guyot, 2017), it is

necessary to address matters such as leadership cultures and philosophies. Rhode (2017) cites such factors as generational inequality, unconscious bias, in-group favoritism, and inhospitable cultures as obstacles that currently exist within many leadership spheres. Rhode posits that confronting these factors are key if progress is to be made in addressing the race-gender leadership gap.

Relevant to this study is my case for the significance of this work as it pertains to the growing body of knowledge regarding gender and racial inequities in leadership. Included in this conversation are the dynamics of leadership culture and how, if at all, it relates to these disparities. This discussion begins with a review of the existing literature, one in which the paucity of women – specifically Black women – in top-level leadership positions is brought to the forefront. Subsequently, I present the reader with both the theoretical and leadership frames that have been chosen to guide this study. Together, these adjoined bodies of scholarship allow me to make the case for my "why" in approaching and discussing this important subject matter.

Significance of this Study

There remains a limited supply of literature in the United States that speaks directly to the complex experiences of women in leadership. Though growing, there is less research speaking to the intricate role of women of color in leadership. This underrepresentation is even greater at the highest levels of governance in all sectors. Simply put, this scarcity can be attributed to the disproportionality in the representation of women and women of color in top-level leadership positions. The divide is even more amplified in the field of education, a realm in which women are largely represented as a whole (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). This information is particularly relevant for black women considering the incongruence that lies between their heightened levels of educational attainment as compared to their generally lower

status within the organizational pecking order (Betters-Reed & Moore, 1995; Davidson & Burke, 2000; Eagly & Carli, 2007). By unveiling the personal accounts of black women holding positions of leadership in varied U.S. educational institutions and settings, I seek to continue shedding light on this important issue.

In the sections below, I introduce the reader to the present study, in which the multiple identities of black women in positions of educational leadership were explored. It begins with a review of the existing literature regarding the intersectionality of race, gender, and leadership within the United States. The tenets of critical race feminism and social justice leadership were intersected because these theories concurrently speak to the black-woman-leadership phenomenon. The intersection of multiple identities illustrates the ways in which race and gender shape the varied experiences of black women in educational leadership. Qualitative in nature, I conducted a phenomenological study to examine the vicariously lived journeys of four black women in educational leadership. The essence of phenomenology allowed me to examine the encounters that black women face both on the path to as well as in their roles as educational leaders. The relevant phenomenon in this study refers to the recounted stories of these women as they reflected, narrated, and connected their experiences in and en route to their present leadership positions.

My objective, in doing so, was to bring a microphone to the voices of these four women who lead. These women broke through the ‘glass ceiling’, navigated through the labyrinth, pressed on past the ‘sticky floor’ and overcame the ‘concrete wall’ in and on their paths to becoming educational leaders. The information gathered is pertinent to the matter of equity and representation within the educational leadership sphere. The emergent themes uncovered might

serve to further the research and theory development regarding intersectionality, education, and social justice leadership.

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND LEADERSHIP

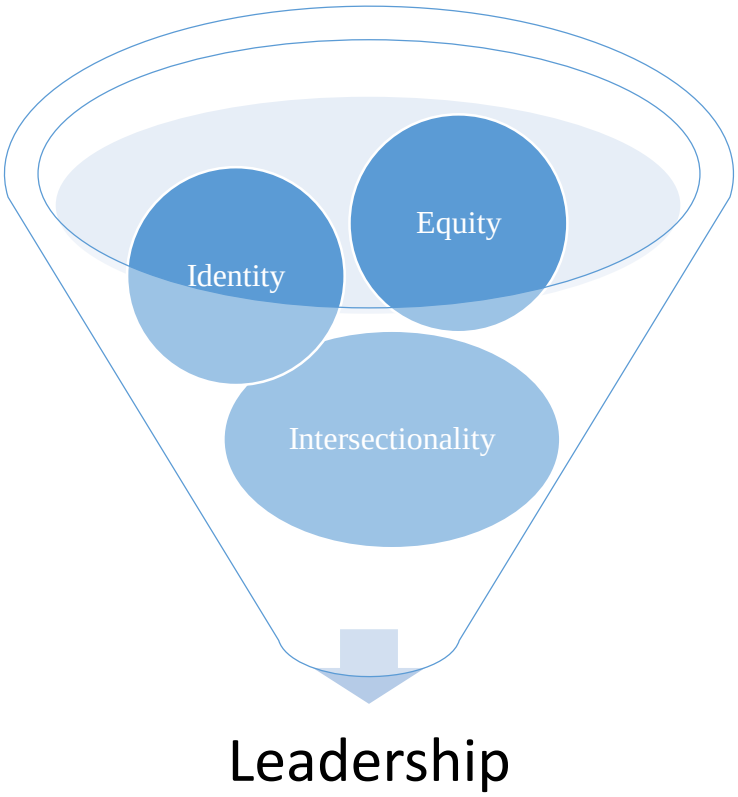

Figure 1 – Equity, Identity, Intersectionality, Leadership Database Diagram

An initial google scholar search of the phrase "women in leadership theory and research" netted a return of roughly 2,490,000 results. A large number of these articles included keywords, terms, and titles such as 'leadership theory', 'functional integration', 'future directions', 'women in management', 'politics in leadership' and 'androcentric'. A second google scholar search using the phrase "women in leadership theory and research" resulted in a return of over 1.8 million results. In this instance, common article titles, terms, and keywords included 'role congruity', 'prejudice', 'consequences', 'diversity and leadership', 'dominant-culture

organizations', 'black/African-American identity', and 'women and minorities in management'. A final search using the entry "black women in leadership meta-analysis" resulted in an outcome of approximately 141,000 articles. Many of the journal articles, titles, and key words accessed during this round included words such as 'labyrinth', 'complexity', 'identity', 'intersectionality', 'diversity', 'advantage ', 'contextual moderators', 'disadvantage', 'contradictions', and 'underrepresented'.

Overwhelmingly, and in all of the above-listed categories, the following recurrent terms and themes emerged when making the direct connection between black women and leadership in all capacities: identity, intersectionality, minorities, and women in leadership. Pertinently, Ospina and Foldy (2010) assert that "attention to the relational dimensions of leadership represents a new frontier of leadership research and is an expression of the growing scholarly interest in the conditions that foster collective action within and across boundaries" (p. 292). Examining the multiple dimensions of leadership, Ospina and Foldy (2009, 2010) claim that bridge-building, leadership for social change, and advocacy are all relevant factors in reconstructing the scope of the leadership sphere. For black women in education, navigating these boundaries includes exploring the historical cultures, antecedents, and contexts of leadership from the perspective of social change advocates (Ospina & Foldy, 2009, 2010).

The aforementioned themes are interconnected in this literature review for the following reasons: (1) identity directly impacts one's social reality, which Wing (1997) refers to as the "multiplicative definition of self" (p. 31), and (2) race, ethnicity, and gender are manifested as concurrent realities (Crenshaw, 1989, 2005; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Ngwainmbi, 2004). These factors directly and systematically impact leadership perceptions, practices, and cultures (Allan, 2003; Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986; Iverson, 2007). Finally, scholars like Hogg and van

Knippenberg (2001, 2003) argue that changing the trajectory for black women in leadership means discussing the impact(s) of the glass ceiling on the identities and realities of those who do not subscribe to the longstanding leadership archetype.

Identity

The dialogue surrounding the notion of self-identity remains cyclical in nature. This concept, identity, "operating 'under erasure' in the interval between reversal and emergence; [is] an idea which cannot be thought in the old way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all" (Hall & Du Gay, 1996, p. 2). Further, assert Hall and Gray (1996), identities are constructed within – not outside of – discourse. Additionally, unity, for example, cannot be understood without fundamentally understanding concepts such as dissimilarity, uniqueness, inclusion, and exclusivity. For this reason, a growing number of scholars deem it important, on behalf of all members of marginalized communities, to seek large-scale understanding through both historical and institutional contexts.

History, economics, and culture must all be noted when considering the impact of identity on those who do not reflect or represent the 'norms' associated with the dominant culture. Since people are born into and do not choose their cultural identities, living conditions, or their initial experiences, there can be a certain passivity, subjectivity, and affectivity (Roosth & Schrader, 2012) associated with being considered a minority in the midst of a dominant culture. Finding the balance between selfhood – nature versus nurture – and its connection to the external macro culture can be, and it often is, a continual feat. What is clear, according to Rutherford (1990), is that identity often only becomes an issue when it is "in crisis, and when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty. From this angle, the eagerness to talk about identity is symptomatic of the

postmodern predicament of contemporary politics" (p. 43). As this relates to black women as a collective, the very mention of the word 'identity', because it is so non-traditional and ambiguous, tends to bring and heighten attention to other terms such as 'identity crisis' and 'identity politics' (Rutherford, 1990).

Connected to leadership, Eubanks, Brown, and Ybema (2012) maintain that more research must be done investigating leadership identities, the impact of identity on individual differences, and how leaders progress from one identity stage to the next. Understanding the relationship between identity and leadership can help us to understand individuals' development and future behaviors as leaders (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Exploring the contextual and intersecting variables relevant to identity is fundamental to explaining how leaders construct, develop, and execute their own identities (Karp & Helgo 2008). Lord and Hall (2003) claim that understanding individual and group identities is fundamental to understanding effective leadership. Consistent with Ospina and Foldy's (2009) critical review of race and ethnicity in the leadership literature is their determination that "insights about the leadership experience of people of color from context-rich research within education, communications and black studies remain marginal in the field" (p. 876).

Pertinent to black women in and en route to positions in educational leadership, progress in this realm begins by understanding that "leadership, identity, and social power are dynamically intertwined in a process that unfolds as group members interact and establish a status structure" (Lord & Hall, 2003, p. 48). The work entrenched in "building bridges from the margins" (Ospina & Foldy 2010, p. 292) involves the furtherance of research geared towards better understanding the roles that race and gender play in the development of non-archetypical

leaders. Directly relevant to and for the purpose of this study, it has been my goal as researcher to further relevant and progressive conversations in this same regard.

Intersectionality

Crenshaw (1989) is credited as the creator of the framework known as "intersectionality". This foundational tool was designed as a way to explain and understand the numerous factors at play in the shaping and perpetuation of social inequities. According to Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality contextualizes and allows for a mapping of the ways in which race intersects with gender, ethnicity, nationality, language, and other key categories connected to social existence, (in)equalities, and (in)equities. The intersectional experience is both interconnected and interminable since all of these factors continuously overlap (Crenshaw, 1989). These overlapping elements, over the course of a lifetime, serve to shape a person's experiences on an array of levels and in a myriad of capacities. Crenshaw (1989, 2005) asserts that intersectionality is much more than a concept, notion, or buzzword. Rather, it should be viewed as a tool and as a catalyst for imparting change, which begins with a commitment to understanding the array of complexities that are embedded within this lived experience.

It is the premise of intersectionality that people live layered identities "derived from social relations, history, and the operation of structured power. In other words, people are members of more than one category or social group and can simultaneously experience advantages and disadvantages related to those different social groups" (Richardson & Loubier, 2008, p. 143). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) maintain that "intersectionality means the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation and how their combinations play out in various settings" (p. 51). Intersectionality holds that the roots of societal oppression, i.e. racism, sexism, homophobia, bigotry, etc., do not act independently of

one another. Rather, as Crichlow (2015) contends, “these forms of oppression interrelate, are tied to each or are connected to each other creating a system or faces of oppression that reflects the ‘intersection’ of multiple forms of discrimination” (p. 188). Additionally, according to Anthias (2013), intersectionality approaches:

> …provide an important corrective to essentializing identity constructs that homogenize social categories. Although social divisions such as gender, ethnicity and class have been understood through the lens of intersectionality for at least two decades and have had a profound effect on feminist theories in particular, this approach has only recently acquired a more central place in academic and political life. Moreover, intersectionality has now become part of policy initiatives, which have begun to recognize multiple intersecting inequalities. (p. 3)

This recognition of multiple identities, directly connected to intersecting inequalities, serves as a critical step towards addressing and improving relevant equity- and equality-based policy initiatives. As it relates to the leadership sphere, it is even more crucial to create and uphold cultures that are inclusive and accepting of all members of the larger constituency. This is especially important as it pertains to those members, including black women, who do not reflect the single-track leadership archetype.

An intersectional-type research paradigm, as Dhamoon (2011) notes, “serves to not simply describe and explain complex dynamics of power in specific contexts and at different levels of social life but also critique or deconstruct and therefore disrupt the forces of power so as to offer alternative worldviews” (p. 240). The infusion of intersectionality methods provides shareholders with the necessary tools to continue unpacking and unfolding these categories (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010). Wing (1997, 2003) maintains that

intersectionality is critical for thinking about how policies, practices, and discourses can be enhanced and transformed. The entrenched policy, legal, and societal ramifications provide justification for the advancement of this frame in transforming the longstanding singular-track leadership standard. This work, therefore, begins with an acknowledgement of the current disparities in leadership, en route to the creation of new policies promoting equity within leadership spheres and cultures.

Intersectionality and Leadership

In line with research connecting intersectionality and leadership, Parker and Villalpando (2007) conducted a study encompassing multiple themes – entailing race and racism, the challenge of dominant ideology, social justice, and experiential knowledge. They collected a set of articles that served to pinpoint the importance of critical theory analysis to administrative policy and practice in the educational leadership arena. Through this study, Parker and Villalpando (2007) claimed that though the demographics of the nation's schools are increasingly comprised of students of color, the percentages of principals who are black, Latino, Asian-American, or other have barely gained ground. Given this reality, Allan (2003) emphasized the need for a 'strategic deployment of discourse', meaningful conversations around gender and racial inequalities, connected to the construction of women's status in educational leadership. Parker and Villalpando (2007) reminded all stakeholders that this matter "cannot be ignored when trying to achieve racial equity in the context of increasing federal and state accountability. Democratic leadership for social justice…and action will provide us with some answers to this challenge" (p. 523).

Ngwainmbi (2004) conducted a study investigating how the social integration of black women into American society could be realistically, meaningfully, and substantively achieved.

The intent of the study was to focus on "feminist intellectual and scholarly pursuits as the basic framework of the struggle for this difficult and challenging task of integrating African-American women into American society" (p. 94). Ngwainmbi (2004) describes the work involved in advancing feminist scholarship as both 'uphill battles' and 'major obstacles'. A primary challenge, specifically, was the facing of social realities that continue to prevent "the realization of social integration for women in general and African-American women in particular" (Ngwainmbi, 2004, p. 101). These realities are further impacted by cultures and spaces in which "continued prioritization of the concerns of heterosexual white males is couched as Normality, Neutrality, Objectivity, and the Truth" (Wing, 2003, p. 1). Especially relevant to black women in education, Iverson (2007) stressed the need to enable and empower policy makers to disrupt the status quo by working to address the racial and gender imbalances that continue to exist in the realm of educational leadership.

Mabokela and Madsen (2005) employed intergroup theory "to understand how both African–American and European–American school leaders perceived and negotiated sources of intergroup conflict and how this affected their potential for creating an inclusive school environment" (p. 187). Through this study, the authors examined white American and black American administrators' responses to intergroup conflict arising from cultural incongruities in desegregated suburban U.S. schools (Mabokela & Madsen, 2005). They concluded that (1) leadership and diversity are continually interconnected, (2) U.S. schools are under growing pressure to educate an increasingly diverse population of students, families, and communities, and (3) creating an inclusive school requires school leaders to vigorously and actively respond (as opposed to simply reacting) to intergroup conflict among an increasingly diverse community/population. In their study on women in leadership and leadership styles, Gipson et al.

(2017) added that more work must be done to ensure that those in and promoted to positions of educational leadership are aptly reflective of this same commitment to pluralism and diversity. The growth and advancement of black women into what has characteristically been a male-dominated realm (Kellerman et al., 2007; Kulik & Metz, 2015) remains relevantly connected to conversations regarding the need to increase diversity within leadership spheres.

Cho, Barrett, Solomon, Portelli, and Mujawamariya (2009) conducted a study in which they utilized a critical democratic perspective (p. 115) to analyze the perspectives of leaders from an array of educational institutions across North America. Overwhelmingly, according to Cho et al. (2009), the study results revealed the need for a more critical examination of the process and outcome of mentorship and induction programs for incoming educational leaders. In the effort to both achieve leadership quality and competence as well as to improve program philosophy, policy, and practice, two major themes arose from participants' perspectives on the new leader induction program: (1) the role of the educational leader in creating clearer collaborations and partnerships among stakeholders (including faculty, school boards, schools, communities), and (2) the role of the educational leader in increasing effective communication and knowledge while maintaining the importance of equity, diversity and understanding community (pp. 125-126). Relevant to black women in and aspiring towards leadership positions, Whang (2018) explored "the phenomenon of perilous politics of school leadership for social justice, in order to strengthen social equity for educational development" (p. 1). Whang (2018) identified the importance of understanding the intersectionality of multiple biases as advocates for justice work to strengthen social equity in the pursuit and development of educational leaders.

Hogg et al. (2001) conducted an experiment, using control groups, in which they looked at social identity, group dynamics, and leadership. The authors investigated the relationships

between group membership and leadership endorsement in the effort to connect demographic differences with the notion of the glass ceiling. Based on their findings, the authors determined that demographic minorities may find leadership difficult in salient groups whose prototypes represent the demographic majority. Further, Hogg and van Knippenberg (2003) concluded that "followers pay close attention to prototypicality… One consequence is that the leader acquires greater and more secure leadership ability. Another consequence is that the status and prestige differential between leader(s) and followers is entrenched" (p. 21). These findings are significant to the development and progression of black women in leadership, especially considering Brown's (2018) research, which indicated "that attitudes based on prescribed racial and gender characteristics render Black and female CEOs as incongruent with leadership positions" (p. 1).

Using intersectionality theory, Moorosi, Fuller, and Reilly (2018) presented constructions of successful leadership by three black women, school principals, in the United States, South Africa, and the United Kingdom. The work is premised on "the overall shortage of literature on Black women in educational leadership, which leaves Black women's experiences on the periphery even in contexts where they are in the majority" (p. 1). Indeed, the analyses suggested that:

> Black women leaders' constructions of success are shaped by overcoming barriers of their own racialized and gendered histories to being in a position where they can lead in providing an education for their Black communities, where they are able to inspire a younger generation of women and to practice leadership that is inclusive, fair and socially just. (Moorosi et al., 2018, p. 1)

Implications, then, include examining the impact of perceptions and evaluations of individuals with multiple stigmatized identities in leadership roles (Richardson & Loubier, 2008; Rosette et

al., 2016; Sawyer, Salter, & Thoroughgood, 2013). In this regard, Moorosi et al. (2018) remain committed to reframing and unpacking the intersections of gender, race and class, and how these elements directly impact black women in educational leadership. In their work, Sawyer et al. (2013) pointed to the extreme importance of "studying and understanding the realities of identity through intersectional research" (p. 80), determining that "studying individual identities is good, but examining intersectionality is better" (p. 80). For black women leaders, advancing this work entails the creation and progression of leadership frameworks that are inclusive, fair and socially just (Moorosi et al., 2018).

Currently, educational leadership research explores factors related to attitude, achievement, and program design for members of minority groups. Yet, this research largely fails to specifically address the factors connected to success or failure of black women as a unique, specific group (Clapp Jr, 2010; Dreachslin & Hobby, 2008). Furthermore, present research regarding black women concludes that, in general, studies and findings relevant to this group lacks conceptual focus that would ultimately integrate or clarify issues informing educational policies, programs, practices, and procedures (Dreachslin & Hobby, 2008; Pratt-Clarke & Maes, 2017).

In a society with an increasingly diverse workforce, Brown (2018) maintains that "two competing theories—double jeopardy and intersectional invisibility—predict the evaluations of leaders with stigmatizing identities" (p. 38). Contributing to leadership and diversity research is essential to understanding the factors that may hinder the success of women (Dean, Bracken, & Allen, 2009; O'Meara, Campbell, & Martin, 2011) and minorities (Brown, 2018). This conversation includes the journeys of black women as they ascend the ladder and assume executive-level positions within the educational domain.

The IIL (Intersectionality, Identity, and Leadership) Triad

The quest for an articulable identity continues. Indeed, according to (Howard-Hamilton (2003), "Double oppression – racism and sexism – was born for African American women when their subordinate status was assumed and enforced by white and black men as well as white women" (p. 19). Centuries later, however, the resulting ostracization remains. Racial and ethnic disparities persist, calls for diversity in leadership continue, and black women are still one of the most misunderstood groups in America (Clapp Jr, 2010). Given the lack of a definitive space in which the voices of women of color can truly be heard, it is clear that an emergent theory, addressing the interests and needs of black women is wholly necessary (Carter, 2012; McCall, 2005). The need for empirically-rooted theories to speak to the voices of black women is amplified as they continue to advance through the pre-established academic, societal, and organizational ladders (Richardson & Loubier, 2008; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). For this very reason, that it has become all the more important to extend the conversations around the development of frames and theories that speak to the unique identities of black women generally, and more specifically, to black women in leadership.

Assessing the impact of role models in the construction of professional and leadership identities, Adejare (2018) noted that "same-gender role models may be especially beneficial for showcasing ways to overcome gender bias, being an inspiration of success, or changing the gender stereotype of women succeeding in male dominated fields" (p. 16). Given that black women continue to provide a substantial pool of potential leaders in education (Prime, Carter, & Welbourne, 2009), making the move towards governance that is inclusive and collaborative (Ospina & Foldy, 2010) begins with an introspective look into systemic power imbalances and inequities. The work involved includes expanding the pertinent discussions regarding the role

and capacity of black women in educational and organizational settings. Pertinent to black women, expanding diversity and changing the stereotypes in educational leadership includes the important job of example-setters in constructing the identities of emergent leaders in their own jurisdictions (Adejare, 2018).

Race, ethnicity, and gender as intersecting relational dimensions, commingled with theories of leadership, provide fertile ground for research and theory expansion in this regard. As leadership theory continues developing to more accurately match the complex intricacies of modern organizations, greater attention must be paid to the multiplicative aspects of identity and leadership development. Recent studies exploring extant power structures, agency, and causality provide some context regarding the factors that are relevant to leadership systems and cultures (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Given the growing educational status of black women in the workforce, it is becoming increasingly important to create and identify research that acknowledges their variant experiences. Munden (2013), for example, states that the administrator experiences of black women as well as the challenges faced in educational institutions have alluded to the extreme importance of developing organizational leadership-based strategies and gathering more narrative evidence from this particular group. According to Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010), the residual outcomes resulting from increased diversity in leadership would undoubtedly benefit all members of the constituency. More and more scholars agree that continued research around black women in leadership will allow for a path in which to sufficiently address the needs of and inform policy around this group on a myriad of levels (Anthias, 2013; Patton, 2010; Russell, 2015; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

The findings of studies specific to leadership cultures and identities can help increase the number and diversity of leaders in general, and particularly, black female leaders. This work is

particularly relevant to black women in and aspiring towards positions of educational attainment and leadership. For the purpose of this study, this investigation relates directly to the path, progression, successes, and barriers of black women within the educational leadership sector. It is imperative, then, through the examination – and juxtaposition – of critical race and feminist theories, along with an exploration into the intersectionality of race, gender, and class, that the essential implications necessary for change are derived.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CRITICAL RACE FEMINIST THEORY

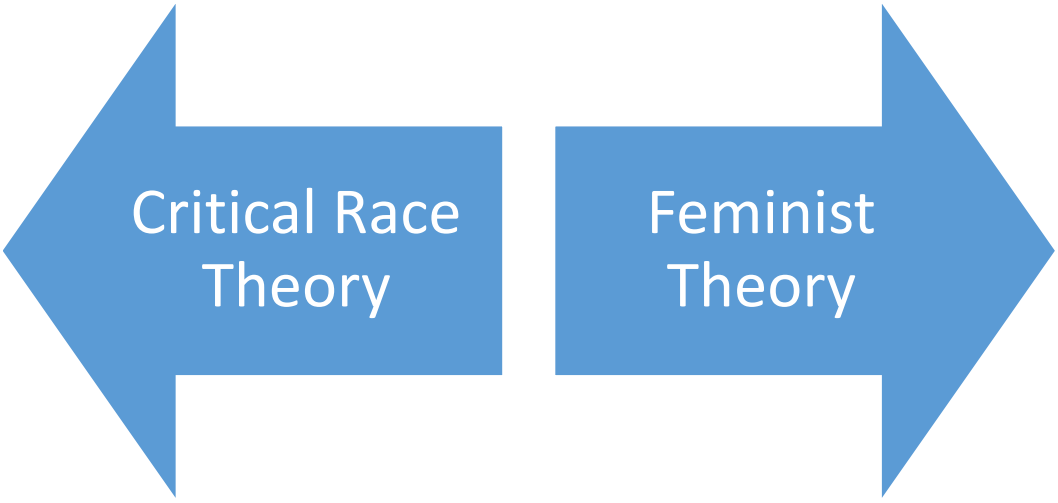

Figure 2 – Critical Race and Feminist Theories as Separate Constructs

Scholars continue to debate whether or not there is a 'best fit' theoretical perspective that can shed light on the unique experiences of black women in positions of educational leadership (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Patton, McEwen, Rendón, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007; Wing, 2003). The constant challenge in the search to uncover the answer to this question is this: many theories are very general and do not consider multiple identities, roles, and other specific understandings (Crenshaw, 1989; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). For this reason, critical race theory

(CRT)[2] and feminist theory (FT)[3] are commonly suggested as the most applicable frameworks to be used in the effort to speak to the biographical accounts that are particularly relevant to black women (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Howard-Hamilton, 2007; Patton et al., 2007; Verjee, 2012; Wing, 1997, 2003).

Yet, critical race and feminist theories as separate constructs remain problematic in that neither one singularly or sufficiently speaks directly to the voices, needs, and concerns of the black woman. In response to the existing gaps that remain in both critical race and feminist theories as independent, stand-alone frameworks, these aforementioned constructs have been intersected for this work. This juxtaposition, critical race feminist theory (CRFT),[4] serves as a more appropriate theoretical frame, as it directly connects to and with the complexities of the lived, black female experience. In alignment with the overarching question,

> *How have the racial and gender identities of black women informed their educational and professional experiences in and on the path to leadership?*

CRFT is immediately succeeded by the leadership frame, social justice leadership theory (SJLT).[5] The tenets of equity, inclusion, and diversity are all imbedded within the core of SJLT, substantiating its applicability to this work. These conjoined frameworks reflect the multiplicative identities of black women, particularly black women holding top-level leadership positions in education. By doing so, I seek to advance the work regarding the equitable representation of black women in and aspiring towards the highest levels of educational leadership.

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[2] CRT = Critical Race Theory

[3] FT = Feminist Theory

[4] CRFT, Critical Race Feminist Theory, and Critical Race Feminism are used interchangeably.

[5] SJLT = Social Justice Leadership Theory

Bridging the Extant Frames – Critical Race Theory

Emerging as a construct connected with legal scholarship, critical race theory (CRT) developed as a means of providing a critical analysis of race and racism, specifically from a legal point of view (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, 2012; Gordon, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Rothstein, 2017). Since its inception, CRT has expanded and taken on form in other disciplines. Interdisciplinary in nature, the tenets of CRT are such that they "challenge the experience of whites as the normative standard" (Colosson, 2010, p. 264) and instead place emphasis on the experiences of people of color. CRT sheds light on race as a social construct and how racial identity and power shape universal structures, practices, and discourse on societal and global levels (Burman, 1995; Closson, 2010; Orelus, 2011; Patton, 2010).

A primary assertion of the CRT movement is that race is not the biological, innate concept that we may be led to believe it is, but rather, that race is a construct that is both societal and legal in nature (Crichlow, 2015; McWhorter, 2000; Simson, 2014). This lack of neutrality, existent throughout American history, has served as a powerful tool used to maintain the privilege of the white status quo while simultaneously subordinating people of color (Simson, 2014). As this pertains to the experiences of people from non-dominant groups, then, a fundamental responsibility for leaders is to prepare themselves – and their constituency – to become productive members of the larger society. An undertaking of this nature involves learning, understanding, and adapting to societal rules, norms, and values. This includes the development of behavioral practices that are consistent with the beliefs and values of the dominant culture. Through this socialization, children-turned-adults-turned-leaders develop an understanding of socially accepted roles, statuses, and prescribed behaviors and learn to

understand themselves in relation to others within the socially assembled structure. This socialization is then passed on from one generation to the next.

Further, CRT examines existing power structures, recognizing that racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American society (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010; Tate, 1997). It is based on the understanding and acknowledgement that institutional racism is pervasive within the dominant culture. The CRT lens identifies that the longstanding power structures, based on white privilege and supremacy, perpetuate the marginalization of people of color (UCLA School of Public Affairs, 2012). Its proponents include a collective of advocates, activists, researchers, and scholars involved in the study and transformation of the current interconnections between race, racism and power (Bryson & Crosby, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Harris, Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 2012). Though there is much overlap between this and more traditional civil rights movements, CRT broadens this perspective by including "economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 3). Additionally, CRT delves beyond enumerable, cumulative progress. Instead, it "questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 3).

Inasmuch as this requirement persists – the need to identify and ascertain the voices of the raced in the academic and societal spaces, critical race theory seeks to address injustices on a varied number of levels. Historically, the communal plight for black Americans involved uplifting the race as a whole; consequently, the focus had not yet shifted to recognizing gender specific issues (Closson, 2010; Harris et al., 2012; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Decades later, though CRT is growing rapidly, it remains androcentric – i.e. male-centered – in nature. Black

women are often left to negotiate this space in the pursuit of true identity development (Russell, 2015). Though complex, the expansion of research in this regard holds important implications for the development and improvement of black females' self-concept as well as their academic and professional trajectories (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Patton et al., 2007; Russell, 2015). For this reason, it is necessary to address this dearth of literature, as a growing need has emerged to characterize the perspectives that speak directly to the needs and experiences of black women. Critical race theory as a singular construct remains problematic in that it speaks to the racial identities of black women, absent from their gender identities.

Bridging the Extant Frames – Feminist Theory

Incorporating "a set of ideas and scholarship in a variety of disciplines as a result of the feminist movement, Feminist Theory (FT) "focuses on women's issues and the liberation of women from positions of disadvantage within various social, political, and economic systems" (Cox, 2015, p. 4). Established in the 1970s as a reflection of the prolific changes taking place during the era, feminist theory developed as a direct challenge to the traditionally-based and widely-accepted beliefs regarding the role of women in society (Bunch, 1987; Ransdell, 1991; Roosth & Schrader, 2012). Feminist theory is gynocentric; women and the experiences and situations unique to women serve as the source of investigation. The work involved in feminist theory is implemented with the intended goal of improving conditions for women (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2001).

Feminist theory examines and offers explanations regarding the social world, how it is organized, and offers critiques concerning how that world has been previously investigated and understood (Alway, 1995; Cox, 2015). Significant to the feminist theory movement is the acknowledgement that institutional sexism is pervasive in the dominant culture (Chafetz, 1997;

Davis, 1990; Young, 2006). More than simply focusing on women's issues, however, what is underscored is how the theory deals with matters in such a way as to confront, counter, address, or change a societal system in which women are devalued or deemed disadvantaged due to gender (Ransdell, 1991; Young & Skrla, 2012).

Discussing the centrality of 'hope' to marginal politics, Coleman and Ferreday (2010) characterize feminism as "a politics of hope, a movement underpinned by a utopian drive for full equality" (p. 313). At its core, FT is rooted in the grounds that gender, regardless of the societal construct, is a universal and inescapable element (Davis, 1990; Hall, 1996; King, 2013). Given that it permeates through all aspects of daily and social life, it cannot be avoided on any level (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2001). This "corpus of work demonstrates the daily 'hard work,' conducted at the micro- and macro levels by individuals and social collectivities, that goes into (re)producing gender as a fundamental feature of social life, indeed, a more ubiquitous feature than social class" (Chafetz, 1997, p. 116).

Nevertheless, though gynocentric in nature, the vast majority of the existing research regarding Feminist Theory (FT) generally reflects the voice of the white woman. For this reason, it is incomplete, for feminism serves as just one of the multiple, interlocking elements – including race, gender, and class – that are involved in comprising the identity of black women (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Only recently has this notion emerged as a real and identifiable issue with psychological, educational, sociological, and societal implications.

For black women, the absence of a true sense of identity – both individually as well as communally – continues to pervade this realm. As with the bulk of studies focused primarily on women and identity, females have generally been indiscriminately lumped into a very homogeneous "uni-gender" subsect. This further demonstrates that FT as a singular construct

remains problematic in that it speaks to the gender identities of black women, absent from their racial identities. For this reason, it is necessary to reconsider feminist research in educational leadership, expanding the conversation to include both women and people of color in the effort to expand our knowledge, research, and practice in the field (Young & Skrla, 2012). Addressing and closing this gap is important, as a growing need has emerged to characterize the perspectives that speak directly to the varied, lived experiences of black women.

Critical Race Feminist Theory

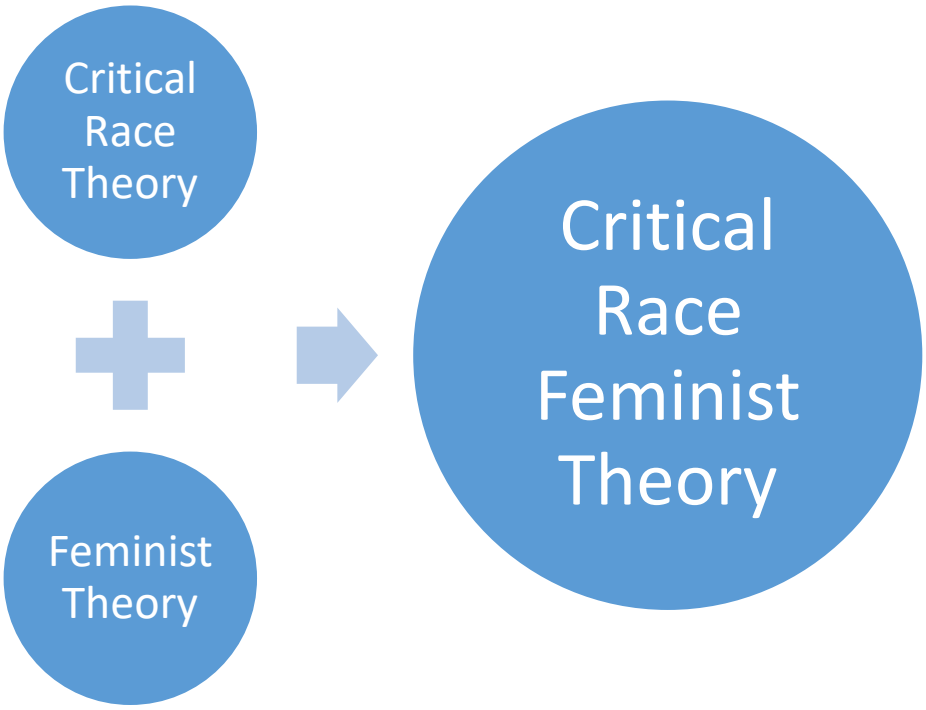

Figure 3 – Critical Race + Feminist Theory = Critical Race Feminist Theory

Critical race feminist theory "seeks to provide African-American women with sound knowledge of themselves, knowledge that is crucial for self-understanding as well as the recognition of their differences and common experiences as a group" (Ngwainmbi, 2004, p. 98). Intertwined into both critical race and feminist theories, a third element – power relations – serves as a core component in the ongoing dialogue around gender, race, and class, and the role

these elements play in relation to the social sphere (Crenshaw, 1989, 2005; Verjee, 2012). More specifically, it involves the examination of the intersections of social oppression, identity and development in the context of inequity, and how these combinations converge in various settings (Carter, 2012; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, 2012; Russell, 2015). Scales-Trent (1989) contend that this includes the right and responsibility of black women in defining themselves, finding their place, and asserting their own rights.

The juxtaposition of critical race, coupled with feminist theory, is used to examine the intersections of race, gender, and power as it relates to the political, legal, and socio-economic systems in America. Numerous scholars (Burman, 1995; Carter, 2012) concur that critical race feminism can – and should – serve as a framework to transform public policies, educational opportunities, leadership development, and more importantly, the lives of women of color (Crenshaw, 1989, 2005; Wing, 1997, 2003). As it is particular to the biography of the black female, class, gender, and race are intricately and undistinguishably interconnected; thus, previous theories and studies focusing on subgroup homogeneity are lacking in that they fail to address the varied differences that exist among and within those subgroups (Carter, 2012; Cho et al., 2009). According to Crenshaw (as cited in Russell, 2015), critical race feminist theory "argues for the analysis of black women's experience coping with the matrix of racism, classism, and sexism, understanding race does not exist without class nor class without race or sex" (p. 13).

Through the continued development of critical race feminist theory, black women as a whole have the potential to become more equipped in perceiving and expressing who they are as an exclusive group. In a "society that sees as powerful both whiteness and maleness, black women possess no characteristic associated with power" (Scales-Trent, 1989, p. 13), CRFT is

regarded as a major step in the formation of an empowered collective – a group who is prepared, able, and likely to understand, define, and determine who, what, and where they are and who they wish to become (Ngwainmbi, 2004). The juxtaposed tenets of CRT and FT are paramount to the building of the current framework (Crenshaw, 1989; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Critical race feminism expounds upon these principles in the large-scale effort to bring forth an empirical voice, one that accurately reflects the needs and experiences of the black female population (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Russell, 2015; Verjee, 2012; Wing, 1997, 2003).

Inasmuch as there is a scarcity of extant works that speak directly to the lives and encounters of black women, there is an even greater need for literature concerning the paths of black women in and aspiring towards top level positions of leadership. Furthermore, black women in leadership within the educational realm represent a distinctively complex phenomenon that has been under-studied and underexplored for far too long. CRT alone does not encompass the elements relevant to womanhood, given its androcentric nature. That is, it has historically and overwhelmingly emphasized the experiences specific to that of the black male. On the other hand, the roots of feminist theory, while grounded in Gynocentrism, do not always speak to matters regarding race and racial differences. Put another way, this perspective overwhelmingly reflects the voices and perspectives of the white female. The notions that CRT is "male" and FT is "white" provide the necessary justification for critical race feminist theory to serve as the theoretical foundation of this study. These constructs (CRT and FT), interwoven and emerging as critical race feminism, indubitably speak to the challenges and successes experienced by black women in and through their work as educational leaders.

It is necessary to identify the intersecting dimensions of gender and race and the impact these elements have on black women in the leadership sphere, in addition to the barriers and successes encountered by black women on the path to leadership. Even more explicitly, Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) call directly upon women and scholars of color to be unyielding in their quest to improve the educational experiences and academic outcomes of the members of their own communities. Further, they call upon advocates to engage more actively in the advancement of educational theory, the development of educational research and testing, and the progression of tangible educational practices. Winters and Esposito (2010) contend that an apposition of both critical race and feminist theories offer a best-fit framework to address the very distinctive, unique needs of black women as a collective.

The embedded notion that education is a great equalizer for upward mobility and acceptance within society (Barker, 1994; Belden, 2017; Lederman, 2013; Leventhal, 1980) remains a feature for black women pursuing roles in education, in leadership, and in educational leadership. Therefore, the interaction between gender, race, context, and occupational level (Barker, 1994; Richardson & Loubier, 2008; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010) coalesced with identity and perceptions of identity within the realm of education will be examined in this study. These elements are intertwined for the purpose of further developing and advancing a framework that better encapsulates the complex, multifaceted experiences that are unique to black women in America.

Through this work, I seek to shed light on those women who successfully carved their paths in and toward their roles as leaders despite all of the odds and proclivities. Further, this study seeks to bring to the forefront the responsibility of all connected stakeholders, especially educational leaders, in deliberately upholding the tenets of social justice and equity for all

members of the constituency. I posit that numerous implications exist relevant to equity, intersectionality, and social justice in this regard.

Critical Race Feminism, a Precursor to Social Justice Leadership. No one label will ever sufficiently serve as a 'blanket for all'. The constructs that are 'race' and 'gender', for example, in no way account for the many entrenched interconnections that subsist within and between groups (McCall, 2005; Richardson & Loubier, 2008). Homogeneous grouping of any kind is limiting and overreaching, at best (Bunch, 1987; Chafetz, 1997; Coleman & Ferreday, 2010; Roosth & Schrader, 2012). Critical race feminism, as a theoretical frame, responds to this by fusing two unidimensional constructs (CRT and FT) into one (CRFT). The purpose of this step is to provide the foundation, utilizing extant literature, to address the array of factors relevant to black women, intersectionality, and the interconnection of multiple identities. Moreover, as representatives of educational equity and attainment, this study concomitantly explores the experiences, perceptions, and implications, all relevantly and directly connected to the paths of black women in – as well as those aspiring towards – positions of leadership within the educational sphere.

The triumvirate that is equity, diversity, and intersectionality remains an under-resolved phenomenon in the ongoing effort to increase representation, especially in the realm of leadership, of groups that are reflective of all the members of the general population (Cho et al., 2009; Harris et al., 2012; Sanchez-Hucles, & Davis, 2010). Critical race theory, again, speaks on behalf of the black race as a whole entity, irrespective of gender. For this reason, it continues to be androcentric in nature. Feminist theory, as was previously mentioned, is gynocentric in nature. It expresses large-scale, gender-specific matters and concerns, irrespective of race and

ethnicity. Each of these frames, independently, overlooks the intersecting impacts of race, coupled with gender, on the lives, journeys and experiences of black women.

Therefore, the mounting need has emerged to characterize and represent the perspective of black women in a myriad of capacities, within the societal, educational, and organizational realms. This need is further amplified as black women aspire and advance towards positions of leadership. According to Ospina and Foldy (2009), leadership studies of this nature "provide particularly rich contexts to illuminate the human condition as it pertains to leadership. Yet insights about the leadership experience of people of color from context-rich research within education, communications and black studies remain marginal in the field" (p. 876). It is for this reason that the following chief yet under-researched components – critical race feminist theory and its connection to both black women and social justice leadership theory – serve as the crux for the current study.

LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP

In a space inundated with philosophies, paradigms, and a myriad of theories, including critical, critical race, postmodern, post-structural, feminist, and multiculturalism, what all of the above-listed theories have in common is this: all fundamentally espouse social justice and reform as the objective. The communal thread among these theories is the demand for institutions to unveil and transform oppressive policies and practices (Mthethwa-Sommers 2014; Rawls, 2009). Among the many responsibilities of leaders is the mounting need to be transformative through a culture of responsiveness as opposed to one of reactiveness (Theoharis, 2007). Particularly relevant in this specific context is the necessity for those in positions of power in educational organizations to intentionally seek and spearhead institutional reform (Ayers, Hunt, & Quinn, 1998; Rawls, 2009).

Social justice theory is as capacious and capricious as the many constructs it encompasses (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2001; Rasinski, 1987). Generally defined, social justice is a value-based set of attitudes or beliefs that people hold about the unequal life opportunities of some social groups in comparison with others in a specific society, and how these opportunities are negatively affected by existing social conditions (Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983; Hodges & Welch, 2018; Theoharis, 2007). Goldfarb and Grinberg (2001) define social justice "as the exercise of altering these [institutional and organizational] arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions" (p. 162). Conjointly, Bogotch (2000) asserts that social justice is a social construction and that "there are no fixed or predictable meanings of social justice prior to actually engaging in educational leadership practices" (p. 153).

To this same end, the principles of social justice leadership are such that the fundamental values favor measures that aim at decreasing or eliminating inequity, promoting inclusiveness of diversity, and creating environments that are supportive of all people (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997; Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983). In full, the all-encompassing goal of the social justice leadership movement is "equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs…[one] in which distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure" (Bell, 2007, p. 1). These principles include but are not limited to the tenets of equity, diversity, and inclusion. These ideologies can only rightfully be established at the very top – beginning with those in the position to impact and impart true and lasting change.

At its core, the social justice movement supports a process built on respect, care, recognition, and empathy (Hodges & Welch, 2018; Theoharis, 2007). These tenets serve as fundamental components in the work to promote equity for all. According to Walsh (2012), "the research literature on the mobilization of school resources…affirms that educational reform has failed, for the most part, to address the quality of schooling and equity issues that serve the needs of ethnically, racially, or culturally diverse youth" (p. 181). It has become increasingly important for leaders of educational reform for social change to seek large-scale transformation of current pedagogical practices (Walsh, 2012). The recent push towards developing school administrators as instructional leaders is one example of this movement-in-action.

As this pertains to the social justice leader, the present discourse involving ongoing plans for educational improvement is striking. This is primarily due to the "near absence of solutions that address the sources of disparity in educational performance between what continues to be considered as 'mainstream' [American as compared to those] who are culturally, ethnically, or linguistically different" (Walsh, 2012, pp. 7-8). In a space riddled with complexities of this nature, this is precisely why there remains a dire need for lasting, proactive social justice leadership within the educational realm (Ayers et al., 1998; Banai, Ronzoni, & Schemmel, 2011; Berkovich, 2014). Another example of this is the call for leaders who more aptly and adequately represent the demographics of the general population. Additionally, there exists increasing evidence of greater attention being paid to the social fabric of education, and the infusion of social justice into educational leadership programs and curriculum.

The social dimension of curriculum development and leadership includes greater attention being paid to issues of diversity and to its impact on the educational, cultural, and leadership environment (Anderson, 2009; Murphy, 1999). Serving to further solidify the validity

of this line of reasoning, Tenuto (2014) conducted an integrative literature review to establish a conceptual framework to advance leadership for school improvement. Through this research, Tenuto (2014) determined that "advancing leadership by cultivating democratic professional practice at all levels of education offers a way forward for educators to research, discuss, and revitalize capacity system-wide" (p. 10).

In line with Tenuto's vision, this progression includes the elevation of all qualified candidates into leadership roles. A fundamental contribution to a more inclusive, democratic, and civic society is the development of the leadership capacity of the members of one's consistency. Pertinent to the direction of this study, then, is the promotion of black women who are primed and qualified into earned positions of leadership. More specifically, and related to this work, are the development, advancement, and acceptance of black women into positions of authority and influence within the educational sphere.

Equity and the Role of Educational Leaders

Equity theory employs a unidimensional concept of justice (Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983). It is the theory's assumption that individuals judge or assess the fairness of rewards versus punishments based solely on the principles of merit (Banai et al., 2011; Leventhal, 1980). Fairness, according to equity theory, exists when rewards and punishments are divvied out in proportion to and in accordance with one's own contributions (i.e. karma). Yet, in understanding the difference between equity and equality, one inherent problem with this theory is that it "emphasizes only the fairness of distribution, ignoring the fairness of procedure" (Leventhal, 1980, p. 27). Challenging the prevailing theories of equity and fairness in societal relationships means also confronting the dominant and longstanding notions regarding equity, equality, and democracy. For black women in and en route to leadership, challenging these pre-existing

notions involves confronting leadership cultures that tend to be hegemonic in nature (Pratt-Clarke & Maes, 2017).

In the effort to mitigate dissidence, the educational system has been known to teach an abridged form of democracy that pretends as if the impact of racialized crimes against marginalized groups can simply be done away with by not engaging in relevant discussion (Berkovich, 2014; Orelus, 2011). The objective in maintaining silence, it appears, is to see social injustices magically disappear by not confronting them directly (i.e., not addressing the 'elephant in the room') (Pignatelli, 1993). Educators and educational leaders alike are held to a higher level of accountability – the choice is to either create a context that surfaces important questions or that shrouds their discussion (Mthethwa-Sommers, 2014; Orelus, 2011). For the critical educator and leader, there is an engrained responsibility to struggle within inequitable institutions and do what must be done to remain connected to the struggles, voices, and needs of the community-at-large (Anderson, 2009; Bell, 2007; Murphy, 1999; Pignatelli, 1993; Theoharis, 2007).

The moral responsibility of educational leaders is especially important in light of the numerous social problems that marginalized groups and minorities face as a result of oppression (Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983; Selsky, 1991). The significance of moral leadership is "magnified in a social context where no one takes charge" (Bryson & Crosby, 1992, p. 283). Just as important to this conversation is the existing literature, largely suggesting that moral responsibility should be taught and instilled in schools. Education, nevertheless, is an open system entrenched within a complex social environment. Leaders in education are constantly urged to examine educational problems, considering the educational system's position as a microcosm of society at-large. An

appropriate examination includes investigating how these issues are formed in and connected to this broad, expansive, and pluralistic social context (Adams & Copland, 2005).

A growing number of building and district-level leaders are realizing their own commitments to being actively engaged in the community (Bogotch, 2000), to promoting environments that support social justice (Mabokela & Madsen, 2005), and to becoming more involved in the policy arena through advocacy and coalition building (Black & Murtadha, 2007). In their current dialogue on how to realize social justice in the world, Marshall, Young, and Moll (2010) argue that if social justice practices are to thrive, policies and norms must be transformed in both schools as well as in the surrounding communities. This transformation begins with role of the educational leader in actively advocating for and promoting justice for all. Thus, when we connect theory and practice to the moral use of power, we can better understand why social justice as an educational intervention is an unceasingly pertinent topic for every era (Leventhal, 1980).

Further, Bogotch (2000) states, social justice "requires an ongoing struggle [i.e., to share power, knowledge, and resources equitably] and cannot be separated from how educational theories and practices are being [re]defined and practiced by professionals within schools, academic disciplines, and governmental circles" (p. 140). This connection between theory and practice, particularly as they relate to the moral use of power reveals why social justice, as an educational intervention, is relevant in every era (Hodges & Welch, 2018). As a continuous social construct, educational leadership cannot be comprised of one design, one program, or one worldview, to the exclusion of other perspectives and approaches (Belden, 2017; Lederman, 2013; Pratt-Clarke & Maes, 2017).

Dr. Crenshaw (2005) reminds social justice leaders of the following:

> Race, gender, and other identity categories are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination-that is, as intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different. According to this understanding, our liberatory objective should be to empty such categories of any social significance. Yet implicit in certain strands of feminist and racial liberation movements, for example, is the view that the social power in delineating difference need not be the power of domination; it can instead be the source of political empowerment and social reconstruction. (p. 1)

Additionally, there exists increasing evidence of intensified attention being paid to the social fabric of education and the educational system. This includes, but is not limited to, the infusion of social justice into educational programs, into the classroom and curricula, and into the development of 'good' educational leaders. Relevant to this discussion is the definition of 'good' leaders as advocates for social justice (Adams et al., 1997; Black & Murtadha, 2007).

The interweaving of social justice into the educational space unpacks multiple levels of ideas and possibilities, including those which are anchored in "the human factors in school leadership" (Murphy, 1999, p. 53). Tapping into this human capital is fundamental to the progression of these same principles. Expanding the number and capacity of black women in leadership is a multi-dimensional effort (Leventhal, 1980; Mthethwa-Sommers, 2014). It means openly and directly addressing matters such as equity, fairness, and the role of the social justice leader in deliberately supporting and promoting these values (Murphy, 1999; Pratt-Clarke & Maes, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Expanded emphasis on the social aspects of education has meant more attention dedicated to investigating the relationships between the school and the community. Similarly, new attention has also been paid to the role of education as a fundamental characteristic of the larger society and to preparing apt leaders capable of understanding and operating from this perspective. For the social justice leader, equity can be defined in numerous ways and through numerous means. The challenge, then, includes deciphering the many meanings of justice as well as creating safe spaces for advocates and outlaws alike to explore and make explicit the connections between the many subjective meanings of justice (Bell, 2007; Bogotch, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2013).

The interminable challenge for leaders within the educational sphere is to create social and political spaces for all advocates and stakeholders to productively function and vigorously engage. Transcendent of any single institutionalized structure, however, is the work involved in deliberately and explicitly promoting activism, intellectualism, and social justice for all (Pignatelli, 1993; Rawls, 2009). Despite the fact that Dewey is criticized for his "largely uncritical treatment of science in the service of social progress and democracy" (Pignatelli, 1993, p. 14), as educational visionaries, we must demand from ourselves, that we do not leave or produce "educational outcomes [which] mirror and safeguard longstanding societal disparities" (Bogotch, 2000, p. 147).

Social justice leadership is actively, overtly, and vividly equitable at all times (Darling-Hammond et al., 2003; Pratt-Clarke & Maes, 2017); this includes the ongoing effort to increase the number of black women, the most educated group in today's workforce, in positions of educational leadership (Marshall & Oliva, 2006; Michelli & Keiser, 2005). From this

perspective, it is essential that the connections between theory, practice, and power be made and addressed as transparently and as tangibly as is humanly possible (Ayers et al., 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2013).

By advancing the existing literature – critical race feminist theory adjoined with social justice leadership theory – it has been an objective of this study to shed light on the pertinent factors connected to the increased representation of black women in administrative and executive capacities. This remains directly relevant to the tenets imbedded within socially just leadership (Anderson, 2009; Selsky, 1991; Theoharis, 2007). The overarching question in the study was:

> *How have the racial and gender identities of black women informed their educational and professional experiences in and on the path to leadership?*

This guiding question, at its core, provided me with a rich opportunity to examine and vicariously relive the unique experiences of a select group of black women in top-level educational leadership positions.

Directly connected to the purpose of this work was my intent, as researcher, to further the work, conversation, and theory development involved in deliberately and explicitly promoting the values of equitability and justice (McCall, 2005; Richardson & Loubier, 2008; Pignatelli, 1993; Rawls, 2009). In the leadership sphere, this is all the more applicable to and for black women, currently primed and positioned for advanced roles in this capacity. According to Pratt-Clarke (2010), the aligning of CRFT and SJLT provides an analysis that focuses on praxis, the relationship between the construction of race, class, and gender categories and social justice outcomes in the work to provide a transformative next step in the evolution of this and other correlated scholarship.

This discourse and study are especially relevant to and for black women, considering the incongruence between their heightened educational attainment (Davidson & Burke, 2000; Eagly & Carli, 2007) compared to their current status within organizational leadership spheres (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Particularly as it relates to the education, understanding, cultivation, and development of all members of the constituency – including the increased representation of black women in administration and management – what is necessary, and what is good, is socially just leadership.

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WRITING HERSTORY: EXAMINING THE INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES OF BLACK WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

This study examined the intersecting identities and relived experiences of four black women, all purposefully selected because they hold some of the highest positions of leadership within the U.S.[6] educational sphere. The following research question framed the study:

> *How have the racial and gender identities of black women informed their educational and professional experiences in and on the path to leadership?*

There is growing literature pointing to the universal, collective identity of black women (Crenshaw, 1989; Crichlow, 2015; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Harris et al., 2012). Moreover, existing literature shows that little reform has been noted in the hiring practices of black women since the 1990s (Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Ponec, 1997; Young, 2006). This incongruence is further exacerbated as it pertains to black women within the leadership domain (McCall, 2005; Richardson & Loubier, 2008). Therefore, there is a need to examine the lived experiences regarding the identity, roles, and perceptions of black women in educational leadership. In the effort to create more relevant opportunities, it is important to define the modern identity of black female educational leaders, faculty, and students against that of her predecessors.

The underscoring draw for black women toward positions of leadership is the promise that educational institutions have resources and credentials, which provide global platforms for issues related to the black woman experience. Historically, educational organizations are rooted in the unending mission to pursue knowledge, undergirded in the value of open-ended inquiry, and the cultivation of the merit-based professional. Yet the mission, while honorable, has not been historically actualized by all because of existent race, gender, and cultural biases toward

[6] Throughout this paper, U.S., United States, United States of America, and America are used interchangeably.

black women in educational leadership roles (Horsford & Tillman, 2012; Mabokela & Madsen, 2005).

Given that all organizations tend to be microcosms of contemporary life, understanding the undercurrents from every aspect of establishments is essential to developing positive and productive institutional cultures (Sack, 1986). Hence, the matter of investigating educational organizational leadership cultures and its impact on leadership opportunities for black women is necessary, for it leads to the development of fundamental awareness and macro-level understandings. It is important to define what the new black female educator collective identity is and its ultimate impact upon diverse leadership representation within the educational sphere (Black & Murtadha, 2007; Bryson & Crosby, 1992; Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2001). By examining the vicarious experiences of these four purposively selected women (Patton, 1999, 2002; Suri, 2011), I encourage researchers to gain a more productive understanding and appreciation for diversification in educational leadership representation.

These experiences provide evidence for a greater understanding of how historic events impacted the trajectory and attainment of educational leadership positions by these black women (Orbe, 2000; Ortiz, 1982). For this reason, a careful examination of key historical hindrances (e.g., race, gender) that have impacted black women in the academic arena is required. Understanding fundamental, chronological occurrences for black women in educational leadership allows me to identify elements connected to the current gap in representation in the continued effort to bring it to a close. So, how can educational institutions increase the number of black women in leadership positions? Again, an understanding of the undertones relevant to all aspect of the organizational system – e.g., the continued problem of inequity in a post-President Barack Obama era – is essential in developing organizational strategies for change (Bogotch et

al., 2017; Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983; Sanchez-Hucles, & Davis, 2010). It is against this backdrop that this study, utilizing hermeneutic phenomenology as its methodology, was designed and implemented.

In this chapter, I introduce the reader to the methodology, that of a phenomenology. In discussing the methodology, issues related to 'qualitative validity' and the limitations and delimitations of the study are examined. What follows is a discussion of the processes I used to collect, code, and analyze the data, as well as a presentation of the results of this study. Subsequently, there is a discussion of the emergent themes resulting from this work. Finally, this chapter culminates with concluding remarks, comprised of policy implications and recommendations for improvement of existing educational leadership cultures.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design – A Phenomenological Study

Phenomenology is "the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view. The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, its being directed toward something, as it is an experience of or about some object" (Smith, 2008, p. 1). Understanding and extracting the meaning of people's lived experiences serves as a focal point of the phenomenological process (McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2009; Vagle, 2018), as this experience is directed toward an object by virtue of its content or meaning (which represents the object) together with appropriate enabling conditions (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith & Eatough, 2006). Rooted in both philosophical and psychological origins (Buber, 1958; Marcel, 1971; Schutz, 1967) the essential themes of phenomenology include empathy, openness, life as a 'mystery', and the role of the researcher in being present to and for the client throughout the entire process.

Defined by dictionary.com as the philosophy or method of inquiry whereby all truths are understood through self-awareness, the term phenomenology is ascribed from the two words *phenomenon* (any observed occurrences that are understood in our minds) and *logos* (the human ability to think and express thoughts clearly into words) (Vivilaki & Johnson, 2008). This process, then, is employed to describe the 'logical interpretation of a phenomenon', i.e., as it pertains to the mind, phenomena are interpreted logically through the use of logos (Vivilaki & Johnson, 2008) to enhance meaning and understanding of one's life experiences (Byrne, 2001; Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999).

According to Van Manen (1990), the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence (i.e., a "grasp" of the very nature of the thing, p. 177). Phenomenologists, then, generally focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a particular phenomenon (e.g., grief is a feeling/emotion that is universally experienced). To this end, numerous qualitative researchers work to identify a phenomenon as an "object" of human experience (Van Manen, 1990, p. 163), in order to uncover and highlight the meaning of a collective's shared experiences.

There is a two-fold aim of the phenomenological process. First, this strategy is used to "determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). Second, this approach is widely viewed as well-suited for communicating the shared meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon. For this reason, it is customary for phenomenologists to focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a specific phenomenon (Vagle, 2018; Van Manen, 2017).

Specific to this work in particular, Orbe (2000) speaks to the usefulness of the phenomenological approach in gaining insight into the lived experiences of cultural group members traditionally marginalized in research and theory development. Orbe (2000) cites the value of this inquiry as an "alternative to traditional social scientific research that has been criticized for creating 'caricatures' to represent certain racial and ethnic groups" (p. 603). In addition, Orbe (2000) details the process, key assumptions and primary challenges inherent in utilizing phenomenology, widely regarded as a "humanistic methodological approach" (p. 603), in race, ethnicity, and intercultural research. As such, this study represented my attempt to better understand and accurately depict the lived experiences of four black women in some of the highest positions of leadership within the educational sector.

Considering the numerous distinct classifications of the phenomenology, the Encyclopedia of Phenomenology (Behnke, et al., 2013) identifies seven unique perspectives:

(a) *Descriptive (transcendental constitutive) phenomenology* is concerned with how objects are constituted in pure (transcendental) consciousness, setting aside questions of any relationship of the phenomenon to the world in which one lives (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 173);

(b) *Naturalistic constitutive phenomenology* is concerned with how consciousness constitutes things in the world of nature, assuming that consciousness is part of nature (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 173);

(c) *Existential phenomenology* is concerned with concrete human existence, including issues of free choice or actions in life situations (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 173);

(d) *Generative historicist phenomenology* is concerned with how meaning, as found in human experience, is generated in historical context of collective human experience over a period of time (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 173);

(e) *Genetic phenomenology* is concerned with the genesis of meaning of things within individual experience (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 173);

(f) *Hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology* is concerned with interpretation of the structures of experience and with how things are understood by people who live through these experiences and by those who study them (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 173);

(g) *Realistic phenomenology* is concerned with the structures of consciousness and intentionality, assuming they occur in a world that is to a large degree external to consciousness rather than being brought into consciousness (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 173).

After much research, deliberation, and consideration, I elected to embark upon the hermeneutic phenomenological route (Heidegger, 1977, 1996). This perspective focuses on interpreting the structures of experience, and on how things are understood by people who live through these experiences and by those who study them (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Hermeneutic phenomenology is widely accepted as "an engaging process where the orientation towards the phenomenon is the matter of central concern and its reporting rhetoric demands for a unique richness" (Gadamer, 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Kafle, 2011; Laverty, 2003).

It is my stance that the core elements of critical race feminist theory (CRFT) speak largely to the voices, paths, and journeys of black women as a collective. I posit that the intersection of CRFT with social justice leadership theory (SJLT) provides a best-fit theoretical backdrop and applied leadership lens through which I have been able to examine the experiences of these four women. Conducting a phenomenological study afforded me the opportunity to dig deep, ask relevant, probing questions, and do the work necessary to uncover the core elements of these women's shared phenomena (black women who serve as educational leaders). Equally

importantly, I was charged with the task of setting aside my preconceived notions in order to best understand the phenomenon as experienced by the selected participants (Byrne, 2001; Orbe, 2000). In the following section, I explain how I actively worked to attend to the ethical considerations consistent with the phenomenological process.

Ethical Considerations

Edmund Husserl, founder of the phenomenology, was a philosopher who "identified intentionality with 'pure' consciousness, or transcendental subjectivity" (Bunnin, & Tsui-James, 2003, p. 842). His assistant, Martin Heidegger focused on "the pragmatic context and the temporal structure of our everyday 'being-in-the-world'" (Bunnin, & Tsui-James, 2003, p. 842). These approaches span both ends of the subjectivity-objectivity spectrum. Additionally, according to Gadamer (2004), "these studies are concerned with the problem of hermeneutics… They are concerned to seek the experience of truth that transcends the domain of scientific method wherever that experience is to be found, and to inquire into its legitimacy" (pp. xx-xxi). As a methodological discipline, it offers a toolbox for efficiently treating problems of the interpretation of human actions, texts and other meaningful material (Gadamer, 2004; Heidegger, 1996).

With this in mind, I elected to employ Heidegger's interpretation of hermeneutics as the methodology of choice for this study. After a substantial amount of investigation, it was my determination that hermeneutic phenomenology was the method of best fit for the purposes of this work. Given the nature of the interpretive process, coupled with the importance of presenting "the hermeneutic phenomenon in its full extent" (Gadamer, 2004, p. xxii), I have actively and iteratively worked to address each of the following ethical issues, exploring the disparities, by employing the methods discussed below.

Bracketing. Bracketing is a "methodological device of phenomenological inquiry that requires deliberate putting aside one's own belief about the phenomenon under investigation or what one already knows about the subject prior to and throughout the phenomenological investigation" (Carpenter, 2007, p 75). It is a way to demonstrate the validity of the data collection and analysis process (Ahern, 1999; LeVasseur, 2003), and mitigate "the potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process" (Tufford & Newman, 2012). I was able to bracket my own knowledge and experience by serving as an active listener and asking direct questions that pulled directly from my participants' experiences. Paying attention to my own biases and predispositions helped to minimize my own 'researcher-influence' throughout the research process. This specific focus on bracketing allowed me – as researcher – to intentionally examine the factors that have constructed the re-lived experiences of each participant. This intentionality, in ongoing fashion, has been vital to my commitment to upholding the verity of the phenomenological process.

Embedded within the very nature and design of the qualitative research study is the responsibility of the researcher in being overtly aware of personal biases that may potentially threaten the credibility of the research. For this reason, researcher transparency is vital (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Kimchi et al., 1991). Biases, prejudices, and assumptions must be identified and revealed (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). In order to incorporate and uphold the tenets of bracketing, I remained interminably mindful of the following:

1. *Immersion* – The process whereby researchers immerse themselves in the data they've collected by reading or examining some portion of the data in detail (Borkan, 1999) and

2. *Crystallization* – The process of temporarily suspending the process of examining or reading the data (immersion) in order to reflect on the analysis experience and attempt to identify and articulate patterns or themes noticed during the immersion process (Borkan, 1999).
3. *Reflexivity* – The process of planning for data collection using semi-structured interviews guided by open-ended questions (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013).

In simultaneous fashion, these recurred until all the data were fully examined, re-examined, and all emergent patterns identified.[7]

My own ability to employ bracketing came into play during those moments in which something 'struck' me. An example of this is in the moment when one woman shared that the men in her life provided war tips, the women, survival tips. I remember, in that moment, wrestling with the knowledge that in general, the women in her life were 'surviving' and 'navigating' while the men in her life were preparing for war. That visual and that moment had a lingering impact in and for me. Another example of this was when another woman, when offering her final piece of advice for burgeoning educational leaders, said simply, 'bloom where you are planted' (as opposed to working towards the 'next best thing'). For some reason, possibly because I had never heard that phrase before, it resonated with me. I found it memorable. It caused me, in a reflective moment, to envision what that would potentially look like for me, as an emergent leader myself, carving my own path in this sphere.

In cyclical fashion, I engaged in reflecting, processing, and examining to allow for a full view and holistic picture of the work at hand. As the primary research instrument, adherence to these processes is paramount (immersion, crystallization, and reflexivity), given that I am not separating myself from this study. In addition to the 12 total hours I spent conducting interviews

[7] The full list of questions posed during the interview process can be found in Appendix D (Interview Guides).

throughout the course of the Fall 2018 semester, another 100 hours was spent transcribing all 12 interviews. Additional data were collected through the accruement of artifacts and media-based sources of information (i.e., news articles and social media). Imbedded in this process has been my enduring commitment to address my own tensions between being an insider versus an outsider throughout the course of this study. In sum, I recognize my role in the pursuit to provide a full and holistic body of work. The complete data collection chart for this study is located in Appendix E.

Informed consent. Qualitative researchers face unique, and "often ambiguous, ethical dilemmas in disseminating this rich data. One such dilemma involves the conflict between conveying detailed, accurate accounts of the social world while simultaneously protecting the identities of the individuals who live in that particular social world" (Kaiser, 2009, pp. 1638-1639). Informed consent, then, particularly given the natural setting entrenched in qualitative research (Given, 2008; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008) is a critical factor to be cognizant of in the accurate interpretation and dissemination of the collected data. As this was a phenomenological study, this includes the role of the researcher as an active agent in (1) respecting the IRB process, and (2) utilizing appropriate procedures to garner informed, participant consent. Pertinent to this work, each participant received a hard copy of both the participant study invitation and the informed consent form, as signed consent was a prerequisite for study inclusion. The complete participant informed consent form is located in Appendix C.

Dependability and validity. The use of techniques to increase dependability (also referred to as reliability) and validity are common in quantitative research; these factors are continually considered as they directly relate to the qualitative research paradigm (Golafshani, 2003). It is necessary to acknowledge the likelihood of researcher bias given the many

complexities rooted in intersectionality, including race, gender, and educational attainment, all connected to the leadership sphere. Relatedly, dependability and validity, particularly from a qualitative point of view, must remain ever-relevant in order to reflect the multiple ways of establishing truth (Golafshani, 2003).

With the tenets of dependability and validity in mind, I worked continuously to guard, on all levels, the integrity of the data that I collected and analyzed throughout the course of this study. It is worth recapitulating the importance of respecting the IRB process, as well as the necessity of utilizing appropriate procedures to garner informed, participant consent. The fusion of multiple theoretical perspectives, coupled with synchronized data collection and analysis, served to further promote the dependability and validity of this study. All relevant details regarding IRB approval for this study can be found in Appendix A.

Credibility and trustworthiness. Rigor and trustworthiness stand as two hallmarks of qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt et al., 2007; Wolcott, 2005). According to Guba and Lincoln (1982), credibility is upheld and sustained as researchers confirm, with their participants, whether or not the members' realities have been fully actualized. In the spirit of respecting the phenomenological process, interviews were transcribed verbatim. Honoring this aspect of the data collection process provided me with the necessary first step in adhering to both the integrity and fidelity of this work. In and throughout this intensive process, each participant was provided with an opportunity to verify that accuracy was achieved. The ultimate, definitive test continues to be this: "do the data sources (most often humans) find the inquirer's analysis, formulation, and interpretations to be credible (believable)?" (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 246). In keeping with this, I made it my top priority to respect and maintain the credibility and trustworthiness of this study in every regard.

Confirmability and transferability. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others (Farmer et al., 2006). As a strategy for enhancing confirmability, I documented the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the course of this study. In addition, after the study, I elected to conduct an audit that examines the data collection and analysis procedures and makes judgements about the potential for bias or distortion. From a qualitative perspective, transferability, "the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings" (Trochim, 2006, pp. 11-12) is primarily the responsibility of the one doing the generalizing. Given that transferability is primarily the responsibility of the researcher, I have worked tirelessly to enhance this process by doing a thorough job of describing the research context as well as the assumptions, decisions, and other relevantly-connected factors that were central to this research.

Limitations and delimitations. I purposively selected a sample size of four participants, given that "the aim of qualitative analysis is a complete, detailed description… Qualitative analysis allows for fine distinctions to be drawn because it is not necessary to shoehorn the data into a finite number of classifications" (Atieno, 2009, p. 17). A limitation in this regard includes the ambiguities that are inherent in the articulation and translation of language (Atieno, 2009). Additional limitations include the sheer volume of data, making analysis and interpretation time-consuming, in addition to the fact that the quality of research can be influenced by the researcher's predispositions and personal characteristics (Atieno, 2009). Limitations such as these must be considered for it is important to provide an accurate context for this work. It is my job, in this regard, to deliver information that properly and accurately reflects the relevance and impact of this study within the context of the educational leadership domain.

Delimitations define the parameters of the investigation (Simon & Goes, 2013). Rooted in this is the responsibility of the researcher in setting appropriate delimitations so that the goals are realistic and not insurmountable. Reflective of this group, my delimitations include the current sample size (purposefully selected, set at a maximum of four contributors), the geographic locales that have been included in this study (I elected to keep all participation within the borders of the United States of America), and the researcher's choice of instrumentation techniques (consistent with the hermeneutic phenomenological cycle – see Figure 4).

Selection of Participants

Given the qualitative nature of this study, it is most appropriate to employ purposive sampling as the prime tool for participant selection (Patton, 1999; Suri, 2011; Tongco, 2007). Also known as judgment sampling (Patton, 2002), it is a nonrandom technique in which participants are selected based on qualities that represent the phenomenon being studied. It involves a strategically designated group of people who can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination. According to Orbe (2000), the value of phenomenological inquiry includes the centralization of diverse cultural, racial, and ethnic voices, infused into scholarly research. Additionally, purposive sampling "offers researchers a degree of control rather than being at the mercy of any selection bias inherent in pre-existing groups" (Barbour, 2013, p. 1116). As a burgeoning educational leader myself, it is relevant to note the unique opportunity I have been provided with to shed light on this phenomenon, the successes, barriers, and vicariously-lived experiences of four black women in and en route to their current roles as top-level educational leaders.

To conduct this study, these four black women were invited to serve as the members of this criterion purposive sample (Barbour, 2013; Patton, 2002; Suri, 2011). These women

represent various regions throughout the United States of America, and all hold articulable positions of leadership within the educational sphere. They were selected because they all have experiences directly relevant to intersectionality and leadership in education. Further, they all represent a diversity of locations, knowledge, and experiences, and all serve in an array of educational leadership capacities. The intention, through the implementation of this rounded, phenomenological design, was to produce quality research that uncovers a breadth of relevant information regarding these women and the totality of their unique leadership experiences.

I chose this format because my professional background and demographic, as a burgeoning black woman currently in the educational leadership domain, affords me exclusive access to this select group of women. To recruit these contributors, I personally contacted them via email and telephone contact to extend an invitation for participation. These participants, purposely chosen from the population based on their authority, knowledge, and judgment (Bernard, 2002; Lewis & Sheppard 2006), have been able to provide essential information specific to the intersectionality and leadership phenomenon. Maintaining respondent confidentiality can generally pose a challenge for qualitative researchers. However, confidentiality dilemmas can be avoided by carefully considering the audience for one's research and by re-envisioning the informed consent process (Kaiser, 2009; Tongco, 2007). For these reasons, study participants' full names have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

The purposive sample (selected participants). The women invited to participate in this study hold the following titles: one district-level executive, two program directors, and one CEO of two LLCs. Maintaining respondent confidentiality while presenting thorough, comprehensive accounts of the lived experience remains a challenge for qualitative researchers. For this reason,

and in the interest of protecting the identity of the study participants below, their full names have been replaced with pseudonyms:

1. Dr. Annie Corene, a leader in higher education, with an extensive leadership background in the K-12 sector;
2. Dr. Simone Freeman, a leader in higher education, currently serving in both the academic and K-12 spheres;
3. Mrs. Jacqueline Goldsworth, a district-level leader in K-12, with a broad background as an educator and leader in the K-12 sector;
4. Miss Monique McCallister, a K-16 STEM education leader, presently serving as the CEO of two LLCs.

These four black women were selected because they all possess a plethora of experiences directly relevant to leadership in the educational realm. Additionally, they represent an array of locations within the United States (Northeast, Southeast, Northwest, and Southwest), a vast collection knowledge, and substantial educational leadership experiences. I personally contacted all four contributors, exclusive members of this sample, and all four readily accepted the invitation to participate in this study.

Data Collection Methods

Data were primarily collected from participant face-to-face interviews (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Wolcott, 2005; Yin, 2003). Supplemental data were retrieved from artifacts and media-based sources of information (Munden, 2015; Schwandt, 2014). Each person engaged in three semi-structured interviews, conducted within 60-minute time frames. Three rounds of interviews per person were deemed necessary to explore the breadth of each person's personal, educational, and professional challenges and successes throughout their journeys to their current roles as

educational leaders. The goal of employing a thorough, intensive 3-part interview process was to decrease the weaknesses of basing findings on any one individual occurrence, thereby strengthening the overall outcome of the study (Denzin, 1978; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

Each participant engaged in 3 60-minute interview sessions, resulting in a total of 12 interview hours (see Table 1 below):

Table 1: Full Interview Schedule[8]

	Annie Corene	**Simone Freeman**	**Jacqueline Goldsworth**	**Monique McCallister**
Interview Schedule	Session 1 – 9/20/2018	Session 1 – 9/21/2018	Session 1 – 9/22/2018	Session 1 – 10/02/2018
Interview Schedule	Session 2 – 10/15/2018	Session 2 – 10/05/2018	Session 2 – 10/20/2018	Session 2 – 10/23/2018
Interview Schedule	Session 3 – 11/28/2018	Session 3 – 10/19/2018	Session 3 – 11/03/2018	Session 3 – 11/13/2018

During the first round, participants were asked to share their background and life experiences, connecting their paths and journeys to their roles as educational leaders. The first round of interviews included questions regarding family structure, relationships, and other supports that served as the root and foundation for their selected paths and journeys. This round of interviews involved contextual factors related to participants' personal and professional development. Pertinent to this context, were the relationships, early experiences, and decisions connected to their growth and progression as people-turned-professionals.

Round two included documentation of contributors' successes, barriers, and other relevant experiences in and en route to their current leadership roles. This round of interviews

[8] The complete, detailed data collection chart is located in Appendix E.

included questions regarding the undertaking to the educational leadership journey. Contextual factors included differing regional locations, varied perspectives, work-life balance, and the navigation of new terrain. and 'then-and-now' decisions relevant to their paths as professionals-turned-leaders. Particularly relevant were participants' unique successes and barriers as they journeyed on their respective paths into the educational leadership sphere.

Participants were asked, during the final round of interviews, to share the lessons and tools they learned and acquired along the way. In addition, they were called upon to share their own advice, strategies, and tools for other, burgeoning leaders – black women in particular – seeking to carve their own paths towards educational leadership. The full list of questions posed during these interviews can be found in Appendix D (Interview Guides).

The software program Express Scribe,[9] along with the accompanying foot pedal, was utilized to manually transcribe a total of 12 audio interview hours. Each 60-minute interview session was transcribed verbatim, resulting in roughly 8 hours of transcription for each audio interview hour. I spent approximately 100 hours (8.33 hours of transcription X 12 60-minute sessions) transcribing interviewees' responses. In sum, the interview sessions, coupled with transcriptions, resulted in a total of over 110 hours of data collection and assembling. In tandem with Express Scribe, NVivo 12,[10] an advanced Computer Assisted Software Program for Qualitative Data Analysis (CASQDA), was incorporated for the purpose of coding and analyzing the collected data.

The infusion of these components served to further validate the data collection process and mitigate any concerns regarding subjectivity of this study's findings (Bekhet &

[9] Express Scribe Transcription Software: https://www.nch.com.au/scribe/index.html

[10] NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis Software: NVivo - What is It?: https://research.library.gsu.edu/c.php?g=115824

Zauszniewski, 2012; Casey & Murphy, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Additionally, and in the continued effort to 'get the story right', it remains my job, as the primary instrument of this study, to pursue trustworthiness. As such, upon extracting the data, I invited study participants to 'member check' – to review, to correct, and to update my findings (Russell, 1994) as necessary for the purposes of accuracy.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a process of making sense out of the amassed data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Stake & Trumbull, 1982). The data analysis process involves the organization of data, a full read-through of the collected data, thematic coding and organization, data representation, and the interpretation and analysis of the collected information (Hycner, 1985). Instrumental to the effective qualitative study is the role of the researcher in actively and simultaneously collecting and analyzing the data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). For this phenomenological study, I chose to analyze the data by adhering to the hermeneutic cycle. This is a cyclical process that involves an ongoing commitment to reading, reflective writing, and interpretation of the data in a rigorous manner (Laverty, 2003).

This recurring process can be demonstrated consistent with the following figure (Kafle, 2011, p. 195):

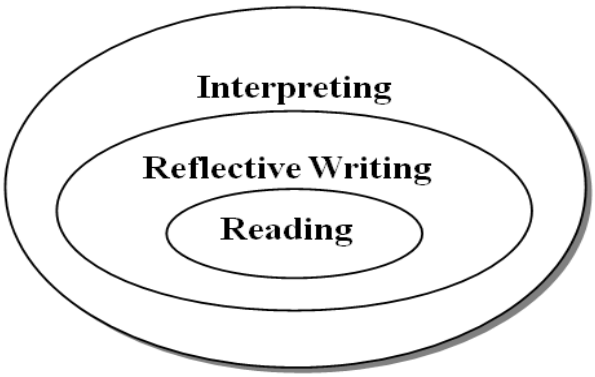

Figure 4 – Hermeneutic Cycle

The hermeneutic cycle (Figure 4) offers a visual description of the way in which interpretive understanding is achieved (Gadamer, 2004). Hence, I incorporated Heidegger's interpretation of the hermeneutical circle, as it was relevant to the purpose of this study. Possessing an "ontologically positive significance" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 269), this circle signifies the role of the researcher in approaching the data analysis process not as a matter of a single, 'conscientious' decision, but as "the first, last, and constant task" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 269). In addition, I have been actively aware that maintaining the quality of the entire research process and the product is the most crucial aspect of the hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Kafle, 2011; Laverty, 2003).

Concurrently, I also integrated Bodgan and Bilken's (1998, 2007) suggestions for analyzing data as they were being collected:

1. *Making decisions that will direct and narrow the study.* In alignment with this directive, the data collection and analysis processes involved three rounds of interviews. Immediately upon IRB approval (August 29, 2018), all members of the study were contacted via telephone and/or email. At that point in time, in tandem with each contributor, we created a mutually agreed upon schedule for the three rounds of interviews. All sessions were face-to-face, and all took place at the host site – Georgia State University, College of Education and Human Development, downtown campus – in Atlanta, GA.
2. *Developing analytic questions.* The foundation for each research question, rooted in both critical race feminism and social justice leadership theory, serves to uncover the lived experiences of the selected participants. By focusing on enquiries that speak explicitly to the intersectionality-leadership phenomenon, it was my goal to keep the data focused, "parsimonious, and illuminating" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 161). The interview guide

questions (Appendix D) were tailored to speak directly to this phenomenon: the vicariously lived experiences of these four black women as they navigated their paths in and en route to their current educational leadership positions.

3. *Reviewing, documenting, and analyzing data interminably.* At the core of phenomenological data analysis is the researcher's commitment to work in and through the methodology of reduction, to search for and analyze the specifics associated with statements and themes, and to search diligently for all possible meanings (Hycner, 1985; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). As participants recounted their experiences, I worked to integrate the hermeneutic cycle as I read, wrote, and interpreted the data. Taking on the active role of interviewer, critical thinker, and transcriber afforded me the opportunity to concurrently collect and analyze the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The goals of hermeneutic research, in line with Heidegger thinking, are to enter the world of the person and interpret the meaning they assign to the experience at hand (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). In line with the mission of discovering and identifying all possible meanings, I combined IPA[11] with the hermeneutic cycle – given that interpretation, reflexivity, and reading are all perpetual components of the phenomenological research process.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

I chose to employ interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), for it is a psychological-based qualitative approach with an idiographic focus (Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011; Smith, 2007), meaning that it aims to offer insights into how a given person, in a given context, makes sense of a given phenomenon (Gill, 2014; Smith, 2007). The emphasis is on the

[11] IPA = Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

phenomena that relate to experiences of some personal significance, such as a major life event, or in this case, the navigation of the educational leadership path for black women. Rooted in phenomenology and hermeneutics, IPA is one of several approaches to qualitative, phenomenological psychology. However, it is distinct from other approaches because it combines psychological, interpretative, and idiographic components (Gill, 2014; Larkin et al., 2011).

The purpose of incorporating the IPA process was to gather qualitative data from my study participants using interview questions designed to speak to the aforementioned components (i.e., psychological, interpretative, and idiographic). I approached this method from a position of flexible and open-ended inquiry, with a curious and facilitative stance, as opposed to one that is challenging or interrogative in nature. IPA afforded me, as researcher, the opportunity to produce findings that were salient, rich, and full of depth. Participants' accounts were captured as I underwent the interview, transcription, and collation processes. My commitment to this process has resulted in a complete and full series of detailed transcripts and findings, amounting to 178 single-spaced pages of data.

RESULTS

I employed the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) model with the intention of providing the reader with a better understanding of the essential, invariant structure (or essence) of the experience (Hycner, 1985), recognizing that a single unifying meaning of the experience does exist (Miles et al., 2014). The utilization of this method involves "self-report data elicitation through interview associated with a sophisticated thematic analysis. The approach is idiographic and invariably linked to non-experimental research designs" (Smith & Osborn, 2004, p. 229). Alongside study participants, I constructed an appropriate and mutually agreed

upon interview schedule. All of the essential steps were followed in recording and reporting the data, consistent with Smith and Osborn's (2004) interpretative phenomenological analysis process. In essence, a "two-stage interpretation process, or a double hermeneutic, is involved. The participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (p. 229). The emergent themes, resulting from this IPA process, are listed and explained in the sections below.

Emergent Themes

The following five themes emerged: (1) characteristics that set these women apart at the onset; (2) community; (3) resilience; (4) perseverance; and (5) the price they paid and/or continue to pay to be educational leaders (see Figure 5 below):

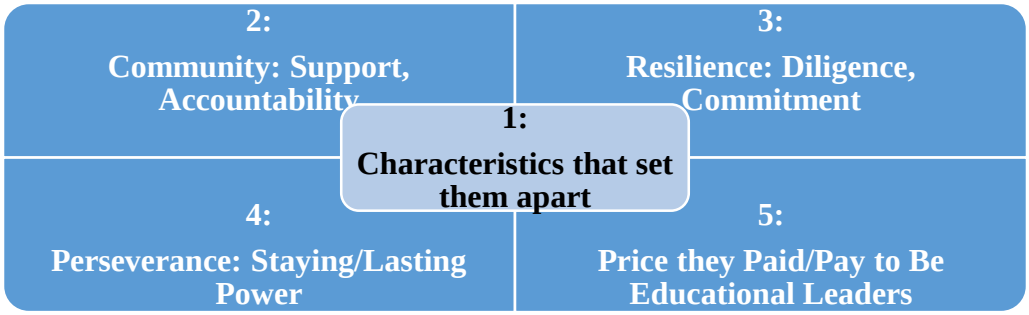

Figure 5 – Emergent Themes

Characteristics that set these women apart. This theme emerged as participants spoke of the early occurrences in which they identified as 'different'. The initial interview questions (see Appendix D) regarding their personal and professional backgrounds brought forth information about the pivotal factors that set their paths apart. Participants express mixed sentiments regarding some of the introductory experiences that comprised their identities. For example, Annie C. stated the following:

> …so, I went through a system where I feel like I had for the most part pretty strong teachers, but I did encounter racism. I didn't know maybe necessarily to call it that at that

> age and stage of my life... such examples as…encountering the middle school counselor saying, 'No, I don't really think you should take honors classes. That's going to be too challenging for you to handle'. (Interview 1)

Further, Annie C. expressed instances in which she "would see just discrepancies on how white educators would interact with other white children versus how they would interact with me" (Interview 1). Reflecting on that, she then noted the following: "when I got to the HS level, I started to realize the tracking system. I didn't know that's what it was but…I was the only black person in my honors classes in high school…a fairly large high school" (Annie C., Interview 1). She reflected on being set apart as the lone black person in her honors classes. On top of that, despite being told by the school counselor that she could not handle the rigor, she shared that she ended up graduating in the top five percent of her class.

Simone F., while recalling some of her most resonant interactions with former classmates, had this to say:

> The first time I was called, 'acting white' was when I was 9, in 4th grade, and that just blew my mind because I never had been around white people before. So, I said, 'how could I be acting white, when you all grew up around white people'. I never have…but that meant because I was in the gifted classes. Well, I was in the…more advanced classes. (Interview 1)

She, too, was set apart as a 'gifted' student. As she allowed the memory of that occurrence to ruminate, Simone F. added that since then, no one ever thought "I was trying to be white outside of that first comment… no one ever said that to me again, never, because... They just knew…I was about my work, and I was going to do what I needed to do" (Interview 1).

Other recollections include Jacqueline G.'s memories growing up in what she referred to as a 'working-class'[12] community. She said, "not too far from where I lived, there was a housing authority. I tell you, …growing up, I never realized that was a housing authority. I just thought, okay, they lived in apartments, we live in houses" (Interview 1). Reflecting on these differences in the shaping of her environment, she also shared, "I never knew racism existed until I became an adult. Because we were just...we just knew each other as a community on the side of town that I grew up on" (Jacqueline G., Interview 1). Growing up in this environment, according to Jacqueline G., is partly why she knew early that she would attend a diverse university. She chose her school because it "represented the real world…and I wanted to be prepared when I entered the workforce if it was diverse, then I'm used to interacting with people of all kinds of races" (Interview 1).

Finally, Monique M. knew from the beginning that she and her affinity for STEM were 'different' in numerous ways. Reflecting upon her experiences, she shared the following:

> I had always been a girl that loved math and science and was encouraged to do so…starting with my 6th-grade teacher who told my mom that I was good in math and science and to encourage me in that. I know the moment for me where it kind of narrowed down was 10th-grade Chemistry… I want to say that since my elementary class, she was my only…black math or science teacher. (Interview 1)

Connecting that experience to how and when she knew she was set apart, Monique M. revealed, "one of the things I do miss, and I think this happens with my parents not having an interest in science, that I don't think I did enough out of school time things, programming, and activities

[12] Merriam-Webster defines 'working class' as "the class of people who work for wages usually at manual labor" (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/working%20class).

connected to STEM" (Interview 1). Because of this, she came to see how her experiences were different from those of her classmates and how important visibility – and lack thereof – is to current and future success in the field.

Relevant to the collective, universal identity of black women (Crenshaw, 1989; Crichlow, 2015; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Harris et al., 2012) is this: every participant similarly shared that they all knew early on, whether they were able to articulate it then or not, that they were 'different'. For some, this realization stemmed from a conversation; for others, it was a result of a specific occurrence. Regardless, pertinent to matters of identity, it would take more time, some of them revealed, before they were able to see the 'good' in their classification as 'different'.

Community. Participants were asked to talk about the support and accountability systems in their lives. They were also asked to share what impacted their decisions to become educational leaders in the first place. The theme, *community*, emerged as participants spoke of the structures, people, accountability and support systems that were central to them and their development into leaders. The topic of 'accountability' and 'support' brought with it a fluidity of relevant participant responses. For example, Annie C. identified her father as a constant source of support and accountability, saying:

> …One of the things he advised me to do [as a school leader] ...he said, 'take 5 minutes and just write the highlights of the day'. So, I did that. On my iPad, my school iPad, I would just go into the notes section and I would type in the highlights of the meetings, parents, things, and…there were a couple of situations where some parents had gone over my head…to the founder at that time, and she would come back, and I would just pull out my iPad. I had my notes, and when I got ready to transition, I literally could say, on such

> and such day, at such-and-such time, we were in this meeting with these people…these people were at the table, this was the discussion... But it was because I had been disciplined enough each day, at the end of the day, to write down what happened. …So, my dad is a support. (Interview 1)

Annie C. shared that throughout her life, she has had phenomenal mentors. Recalling a recent conversation with one mentor, she shared, "we were talking about accountability. …the definition that he told me of accountability is: 'You give the answer before you're asked'. And I really, I feel like as a professional, I've operated that way. …you know, I'm pretty transparent" (Interview 1). This definition provides her with something concrete as she continues to build and grow her own leadership community.

Simone F., when called upon to identify her support and accountability systems, shared the story regarding her mother's decision to quit her job to pursue her dream career. Years later, Simone F. shared how relevant her mother's choice was when the time came for her to make her own, similar decision:

> I put my mother in there because me quitting my job, literally… I just knew I needed to quit... And I only had two weeks to decide, to sign my contract or not. Well, I didn't sign it. Not knowing if I had…been accepted to the program. But that was, that was my mother...that was my mother. Knowing that she could quit her job…with two children and a husband…to pursue her dream. I know I could do that. So that, definitely, is my support, my everything. (Interview 1)

Simone F.'s mother provided her with a real, tangible example, one in which she was able to draw direct inspiration from. That precedent set by her mother proved instrumental to her own decision to leave the K-12 classroom and pursue her doctorate full-time.

While the first two participants directly connected community to family, the other two spoke of extended family as the people who comprised their sense of community. Jacqueline G., for example, shared that her sister's boyfriend played a major role in helping her complete her student teaching. She had a 45-minute commute but according to her, "…I did not have a car…and he went and co-signed…a car to drive to my student teaching and I paid him every month, the car payments, out of my financial aid and my money that I made working… (Interview 1).

Finally, in reference to her own support system, Monique M. shared these thoughts:

> ...support system is diversity of things. I don't, I don't want to say I have a formal accountability thing, but what is a real blessing in my life is that I do have a circle of sister-friends that we all talk about our goals and our dreams. [In addition], I do have an informal accountability through my mentor. But just having this sister circle that I've picked up through different journeys. …because we're all striving to be better personally and professionally, you know, we do…celebrate each other's success… (Interview 1)

In doing so, Monique M. shared, she has built community by aligning with supportive people at different stages of her life. Throughout her journey, she has found, in sum, that "you really have to make sure that you prioritize and have the space for the things that are really, really important to you" (Interview 1). The presence of community is especially important, she expressed, given that "there's an isolation with entrepreneurship… There is a, you know, as black women you don't have as much resources" (Monique M., Interview 1).

Despite the range of people who provided these women with a sense of community, what was similar for all was this: every participant readily identified multiple sources of 'community' in their lives. Every participant identified that these support and accountability systems were key

in their initial decisions to undertake their leadership journeys. Applicable to this is Bryson and Crosby's (1992) assertion that positive, supportive cultures tend to breed success. For this reason, the effort to increase diversity and representation at the highest levels of leadership (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2001) must include conversations around community, connected to and within the leadership sphere (Black & Murtadha, 2007).

Resilience. This theme, *resilience,* emerged as participants spoke of the life experiences that equipped them for the undertaking of the leadership journey. They were asked, among other things, how they believed their paths to be unique as black women. In addition, they were asked to talk about the successes and barriers they encountered on their leadership journeys. Finally, they were asked to talk about how these experiences informed their paths. Jacqueline G., throughout her journey, always viewed herself as a 'gap-filler'. Considering that, she shared the following:

> I think the same thing that made me become an engineer is seeing things in a certain way and wanting to solve certain problems and knowing that I could not do that if the buck didn't stop with me. I couldn't make the decisions. I couldn't make it happen in the way that I wanted to make it happen. And so, that was the decision for me. …if you want to see it, you want to create it. (Interview 2)

Based on her own experiences, Jacqueline G. said, "Who knows? …I pursued a STEM career because I love math and science. But most kids aren't going to be that ambitious... They really do need the parental support…a lot of parents don't know how to do that" (Interview 2). As for resilience, she "saw the need", and knew that she had to do something about it, particularly in a space in which "we" are and remain underrepresented (Jacqueline G., Interview 2).

Similarly, Annie C. shared that before she attained any official titles, she was already a referent leader in her own right:

> I just, I was the type of person, I saw things wrong and I would try to solve the problem with as much leeway as people would give me. You know, like, okay, if you going to let me do it then I'll to do it, you know. I didn't need a title to officially do it. (Interview 2).

According to Annie C., this capability served her well throughout her journey, in that she believes she has been to "…make a decision and own up to your decision'. As a leader, you can't be afraid to make a decision. You have to make a decision with the best information that you have at the time and move forward" (Interview 2).

Reflecting on her path to the leadership sphere, Simone F. spoke of the contrasting encounters she had as a student and staff member in the academy. As a student, she shared, "I never felt I could not be me, I could not be a student of color, be a black student, focus on black students, black issues…in my program. …I just felt as if I had support… I did" (Interview 2). Now, however, "…it's a different story. Now, mm, ooh, child, this is the...the Band-Aid has been peeled off. The cover has been removed, and now I see some issues in…dealing with students of color. Children. Oh, definitely. Definitely" (Simone F., Interview 2). For her, the journey to leadership was completely different than what she experienced upon arrival.

Jacqueline G. shared a number of instances in which examples were set before her to help pave the way. When I asked about the uniqueness of her leadership journey as a black woman, she readily recounted the memory of one high school teacher in particular. This teacher served as an important visual representation for her. She said, "I just loved how classy she was and how passionate she was about teaching literature, and I just said to myself, 'I want to be [like her] one day. I want to be that type of teacher'". (Interview 2)

Years later, that same teacher became Jacqueline G.'s department chair. Not long after that, Jacqueline G. began her own venture into the realm of leadership.

In a space that has been historically exclusive (Horsford & Tillman, 2012; Mabokela & Madsen, 2005), participants shared insights, in resounding fashion, regarding their ability to successfully navigate en route to their leadership roles. Throughout their journeys, all participants shared a collective sense of resilience. Their responses shed light on how they were able – and equipped – to answer the call to lead. Their stories reflected the essentiality of this information in developing strategies for organizational progression and improvement (Bogotch et al., 2017; Sanchez-Hucles, & Davis, 2010).

Perseverance. Participants were asked to speak to their experiences as current educational leaders. They talked about the uniqueness of their roles as black women in educational leadership. In addition, they spoke about the successes and barriers they encountered and continue to encounter as leaders. Finally, they were asked to talk about how these experiences continue to inform their paths.

Jacqueline G., reflecting on her role as a district-level leader, revealed the following:

> I am the first African American, not male or female, but the first African American executive…in the [entire] school system. So, I'm in the room with 20 others …there's probably 23 of us. …And I'm the only African American in the room**.** And it just hurts me that I don't understand how we can't see that is an issue because it's not representative of our demographics. It's not even representative of our leadership at our school level. Because when you go to the school level, we have African American principals, we have several, a lot of African American assistant principals. We're pretty

> diverse at the school level, but we're not diverse when it goes beyond the school. (Interview 2)

She credits her journey, in large part, to her ability to be tenacious and persistent. So, in response to what she sees as the lack of black Americans in leadership, Jacqueline G. believes it is her responsibility to connect with and build the next crop of leaders. She shared that she has been actively "finding talent in African Americans. …And I connect with them. …I have to be conscientious. I have to be aware that that is an area of need in our system because our students need to see it" (Interview 2).

Annie C., who considers herself to be a 'servant-leader', holds the principles of character, values, integrity, and moral leadership in high regard. To that end, she said, "When you're in a leadership position…You have to make decisions with the information that you have and then be willing to move forward, you know what I mean? Stand behind those decisions…" (Interview 2). Speaking to the successes and barriers she encountered throughout her journey, she had this to share:

> I feel like…the fact that I don't have support is tolerated because I'm a black woman. I do feel like that. Because I feel like, if, if it was a white male, you know, or even a white female in this position, I feel like they would have gotten help. Like their…requests would have been validated, heard… I love the work that I get to do. I don't love the, um, politics and hoops that I have to jump through to get it done. (Annie C., Interview 2)

Unique to her as a black woman in educational leadership, Annie C. said, "needless to say, I met resistance". Nevertheless, she is able to persevere by letting her work speak for itself. She shared, "so if I choose to do something, I want to do it well…one way I define success is

winning. You know, achieving your goal. And so, with that definition, I've had a lot of success" (Interview 2).

Simone F. credited her role as a self-proclaimed advocate for her ability to successfully undertake the leadership path. Reflecting on her journey, she said,

> I perceive myself… [As] an advocate. …I believe that if I were a white male, then my, what I do would be much more elevated… If I were a white male, I don't believe my black boss would have told me, 'you can do much more'. Because he would have seen my work and because I'm a white male and everything I do… Everything that white males do seems to be elevated. (Interview 2)

Regarding her own challenges as a philanthropist, entrepreneur, and non-traditional leader in education, Monique M. said this:

> …a situation that I battle sometimes, like you have to constantly prove yourself. Your tone is policed, your body is policed, um, people want to make you prove things, and um, this is even something that I, I'm getting better at, but I struggle with. Like staying in environments and being your authentic self …saying I don't have to prove myself to anyone. So, I belong here too, like, I don't have to prove I got invited to the same table. But people will make us feel like, 'How're you here? Why're you here?' And just, if women can learn how to navigate that earlier, um, and have that confidence and not having to prove yourself, it wastes a lot of time. (Interview 3)

Perseverance, for all participants, was a common thread with much overlap. Some examples include Simone F.'s statement that, "…there can't be as much…relaxation and being able to move through the day in your job. Because you have to face…all these little microaggressions" (Interview 2), and Monique M.'s comment about the constant 'clutter' and

'chatter' she sifts through daily. She said "…it kind of doesn't allow you to just to be free to just move throughout your day and/or life sometimes. Because it's all these extra things attached to what your professional life…looks like" (Interview 2). Still, all were able to speak to their ability to persevere despite existing, inequitable cultures (Bogotch et al., 2017; Sanchez-Hucles, & Davis, 2010). The capability to persist through challenges such as these, all confirmed, has been essential to their staying and lasting power as leaders.

The price they paid and/or continue to pay to be educational leaders. Consistent with this theme, the price they paid to be leaders, participants were asked to share their knowledge regarding the challenges (successes and barriers) they believe face black women aspiring towards careers as educational leaders. Additionally, these women were asked to provide insight regarding their own navigation of the leadership sphere.

Not long into our final interview session, Jacqueline G. had this to say:

> When you sign up to be a school administrator, you're signing up for stress. …mental, physical, you are signing up for sleepless nights. You are signing up for emotional turmoil… You have these internal struggles sometimes with, you know, doing the right thing, doing what you know in your gut is what should be done. But then you've got those external forces, you know, district expectations, uh, other expectations. (Interview 3)

When probed to elaborate further, she continued:

> But you still need to be aware that there are sometimes, there are going to be barriers in certain environments. But I truly believe that you can overcome those barriers if you learn to play the game. Because it really is like a game, in maneuvering your way through corporate America. Because even though I'm in the public sector, education is a big

> business. It is like a corporation too, because it has different levels of leadership just like corporations. (Interview 3)

Pertinent to those women who aspire to educational leadership, Jacqueline G. was able to speak to her own price paid to be a leader. In the leadership sphere, she revealed, "people make decisions about whether or not you're going to be allowed opportunities in those upper levels of management just like in corporations. So, you really have to start paving your way at the onset" (Interview 3).

When invited to share her insights on leadership culture and the representation of various groups in the leadership sphere, Annie C. said,

> "…you see privilege on display all the time. White privilege, white male privilege, um, voices of African American or professors of color trying to be silenced during faculty meetings or not understanding their perspectives… The reason why there are not more black people in positions of power, influence is because of racism. That is intentional. There's no sugar-coating it. But we see that play out in so many other areas of our society. So, it's, it's not much different, you know? (Interview 3)

As it relates to the price she paid – and continues to pay – to be a member of the academy, Annie C. contends that "just the same way that you tout [diversity] with the student population, if they wanted [diversity] at the top echelon, it would be. They don't want it to be. They are racist. It's institutional racism" (Interview 3).

Simone F., reflecting on the alignment between her expectations and her current experiences as a leader in academia, shared this:

> I always thought, just focus on that and all this will come. And I still believe that. Just focus on your work. People will see your work, people will congratulate you, people will

> give you titles, people will give you raises, don't worry about that. And I still believe that, but then, I guess you al, I'm learning that you also have to fight for yourself in that, [the academic] arena also. So, there's just a whole bunch of fighting that has to happen all the time. A whole bunch. A whole bunch. (Interview 3)

When asked to connect her experiences and her ability to overcome, Simone F. spoke to the price she has and continues to pay to be a leader as she relayed a recent conversation with her father:

> My father says, 'we succumb to racism, [or] we overcome racism'... And so, we as black people may not be racist, because we don't have any power in this country to be racist, but we can…succumb to racism. So, we can succumb to the stereotypes that racism has placed in our society. …Our actions can reflect racism also. Our thoughts can reflect racism. So, that's what I just chalk that up as…we're, this has been going on since what, 1619. And so, it's going to take a lot to overcome. (Interview 2)

How, as a black woman in leadership, are these experiences and the price they paid unique? Jacqueline G. stated:

> As black females, we've got to realize that society does have certain perceptions about us, and we have to work harder sometimes to change how they perceive us. And we have to be a little bit softer…sometimes in order to move to where we want to go. …I'm not saying be fake. Don't be somebody you're not because it'll end up backfiring on you. But just start being more aware of how am I presenting myself? Am I coming across too harshly? (Interview 3)

While there was variance regarding the role of the recipient in changing the way she is viewed, what all participants shared was the notion of the "fight". In this respect, they communally referred to the fight against being marginalized, overlooked, unappreciated, and characterized in

ways that do not necessarily represent them (Annie C., Simone F., Jacqueline G., Monique M.). Simone F., not resigning herself to the notions of others, said in the event that people "do have issues with my personality, they know my work. And so...so for me, I do and I don't have to be too worried about the way people have mischaracterized me, you know. Yeah, but all that will happen. (Interview 3)

Finally, Jacqueline G.'s concluding remarks, regarding the slow progression of women within the realm of educational leadership, were:

> So how is that we have so many top-level positions that are held by men in education? …I think it's because for so many years, like, what the MeToo movement is about, we don't stick together. As women, we have to stick together. So that's something that also I'm starting to pay more attention to myself. Like certain roles we think a man is supposed to do that. No, we need to open up our eyes… When you as a woman get a position of power and influence, open your mind to ensure that not only there is racial diversity, but there is diversity in reference to gender. We have to stick together and not minimize each other. I think that's something that's hurting us in our field in that area of, of upward mobility as well. (Interview 3)

These comments are consistent with the growing body of scholarship focusing on "women's issues and the liberation of women from positions of disadvantage within various social, political, and economic systems" (Cox, 2015, p. 4). In education, for example, this includes confronting Jacqueline G.'s 'so how is that we have so many top-level positions that are held by men?' question. Regarding existing power relations, it is important to expand the current discourse around gender, race, and class, and the role these elements play in relation to the social and organizational spheres (Crenshaw, 1989, 2005; Verjee, 2012).

In sum, study contributors provided me with ample information regarding their realities, perceptions, and strategies for navigating and leading within the realm of leadership. The five emergent themes reflected these women's insights and totality of their experiences as leaders within the education sphere. All spoke to 'answering the call' to lead, and all spoke to the numerous responsibilities – and proclivities – of serving in spaces in which they are and remain underrepresented.

Subsumed themes

Wrapping up all of the interview sessions, contributors were asked the following final questions:

1. What factors do you believe can, should, and do contribute to the number of black women in educational leadership?
2. What challenges do you believe face black women aspiring towards careers as educational leaders?
3. What strategies for success have been shared with you along the way?
4. What advice/strategies for success do you have for black women aspiring towards careers in educational leadership?
5. What concluding remarks do you have for those seeking to more fully capture the experiences of black women serving in and aspiring towards careers in educational leadership?

Drawing from their own recollections and personal experiences in response to these questions, participants revealed the following encompassed themes:

Visibility. Simone F. spoke to the importance of seeing black people in positions of influence. These images, she shared, helped her in her own transition into the real world. Regarding this, she stated that growing up, she saw:

> An abundance of black excellence. Black people are not just regulated to…one community. …It is not normal for black people to not be professionals, to not be smart. Being smart does preclude you from being black or understanding, um, or... not embracing who you are. Um, you don't have to be white and be smart. Or, or turn your back on who you are, black culture, in order to say, in order to embrace excellence and being smart (Interview 1).

For this reason, she said, she is "so glad we started there…so that I could continue to thrive..." (Interview 1).

Education. All participants spoke to the importance of education in their families. Now on the other side of the student space, Simone F. added the importance of not just 'an' education, but a 'good' education. Recalling her experiences as a student – turned – leader in the academy, she shared:

> School prepares you for a world that is not. It is not here. So, when I jump out of school, I come into this world, I'm thinking I'm going to experience what school has prepared me for, which is this oasis, this utopia. And it's not there. It's not what we said we wanted in school. What we learn about in school, about how we want to teach the kids …level the playing field… When you get into the real world, that's not there. And when you speak up and say, 'wait a minute, weren't we trying to go for this'? Be quiet. What are you doing? Don't say that. So, I consistently get disappointed in the real world. Consistently. (Interview 2)

Simone F. was specifically referring to the disconnect she experienced with what she believed she was striving to do versus what the educational sphere actually resembles. An example of this was when she asked, "How do we sit on scholarship and not know that black people, black children need black instructors? …it's important to have that representation. It's important to be diverse…We sit on this foundation of scholarship. And we don't use it" (Interview 2).

Collaboration. As Jacqueline G. transitioned from student teacher to teacher to leader, she revealed:

> Being in this position, being an African American female [connecting with] African American females…I think that has served me well because I relate to them, I share my personal stories with them. And especially when they get to the point where they say, 'I'm not meeting with them unless I, somebody from the board office comes'. And if I show up to the meeting and they see an African American, oh it's a done deal. Like, it's, it's resolved. The issue is going to be resolved. (Interview 2)

Essential to the building of community, she talked about the importance of visibility in the effort to build the spirit of collaboration amongst one's constituency. School leaders must connect with parents, she said, because "they just feel like somebody's on their side and that's what I try to teach the schools, that we have to make parents feel that it's not us against them" (Interview 2).

Exposure. Annie C. spoke to her reality as a black woman, underrepresented in the world of academia. She said,

> I think exposure is very key. For many different levels and many different lenses. Academia is very white. It's different. I just feel like there are a lot more barriers and, um restrictions, or less opportunities for black women in academia than there are in K-12… I feel like the opportunities are not as numerous as they are for black women in K-12. At

> least that's been my experience… But in administration and faculty, it's predominantly white. And predominantly white male. You know …the administration and teaching space is, lacks diversity. (Interview 3)

Monique M. also spoke about African American students and their general lack of exposure to the STEM fields. Recalling her decision select her major, she said,

> … I went on to major in Chemical Engineering… My transition as a STEM educator was kind of accidental. It wasn't intentional. ...how I ended up starting my nonprofit is just, when I was working at a school, just seeing kids who, um, didn't do, didn't even think about STEM careers.

"Heartbroken" by this, she began "trying to see what the barrier was, and most of it was just exposure. …the things that they were naming [were] careers that they were exposed to" (Interview 1).

Mentorship. Annie C., sharing her advice and strategies for success, had this to say:

> Village...mentorship, I think is important. ...And then, mentorship, really you know, grit and resilience, I think is important. And knowing who you are, you know. Because people will really challenge you and try to take you places that you really don't have to go with them. ...I think it's important to, you know, set goals for yourself. Professional goals and personal goals. And you know, just the whole self-care. You know, taking time for vacation, doing the things that you like to do. Thinking about the things that bring you joy, make you happy. And making sure you integrate those into your schedule so that you can do the hard work and not go crazy... (Interview 3)

Pursuit. Monique M. shared much regarding her path as a STEMpreneur; in general, she spoke to what she views as a very individual, and oftentimes isolating experience. In that same vein, she had this advice to share with burgeoning black women, aspiring towards leadership positions:

> Whatever your dreams or ideas are, [be] okay with the risk associated with pursuing them. [Be] authentic to whatever you envision for your career and what you want to do. Um, and going with it as it changes in your career. …Don't silence [your voice] cause we as black women don't even have enough chances to say our voice. (Interview 3)

Relevant to those black women, myself included, who aspire to become leaders in education, Simone F. added this:

> Keep your purpose the forefront of what you do. ...90-95% of what I do, I love. It's just that other part, 5-10%, I'm still trying to navigate. I am. And I think we'll all continue to try to navigate that. I don't think that's ever going away. That fight, it's going to be the same. It may be different iterations; it may have different masks on it. …So, same fight. I don't think these fights are going to change at all. (Interview 3)

Her advice regarding tools and strategies for those preparing for this potential 'fight'? Simone F. said, "It's a matter of being able to just live your life and live a healthy, happy life based upon your purpose in life. And not let anyone – I mean no one – take that from you" (Interview 3).

Authenticity. The importance of maintaining one's own vision cannot be understated, shared Monique M. Her advice to those preparing to navigate the leadership sphere is:

> Definitely be authentic. …never be…afraid to grow and evolve and change directions. Or start over. …it is okay to make shifts. …recognize early what you need and want out of

> your personal and professional relationships and try to get there. …work on having an abundance of the most important things. (Interview 3)

Being authentic, she said, is much less pressure than trying to have it all. As a black woman in leadership, there are "many expectations of us, and we're being pulled in different directions, and so that causes us to have a diversity of emotions. But nobody says, she has to work leave her alone, right? So that's just the nature of it" (Interview 3).

Truth. Finally, Annie C. emphasized the importance of living in one's truth. She said,

> Stand in your truth…the truth of who you are. The truth that you want to accomplish, and the mark you want to be and how you want to live your life. …be sure that when you're making decisions about your life, you're getting counsel and maybe different perspective. But when it's time to make the decision, you need to hear your own voice and if you believe in God, God's voice.

Staying true, said Annie C., means "find[ing] a way to do things that are good for you mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally" (Interview 3). Remember to honor all that makes us who we are, said Monique M., because black women are "multi-dimensional" (Interview 3).

Conversations of this nature serve to advance relevant discussions regarding the importance of mentorship, visibility, and knowing one's 'why'. Educational institutions remain rooted in the promise that they have the credentials and the capital to provide global platforms for matters relevant to all members of the constituency. For the participants of this study, as black women and as educational leaders, these subsumed themes shed light on each person's ability to connect and hold fast to the 'why' that led them, kept them, and continue to keep them in the educational leadership sphere.

DISCUSSION

The ongoing work towards evolving away from perspectives steeped in the Civil Rights era towards modern theoretical methods includes identifying and discussing the implications stemming from the recounted, retold stories of those who understand this evolution firsthand (Bogotch, 2000; Bogotch, Schoorman, & Reyes-Guerra, 2017). I deem it both relevant and necessary to bring to the forefront the perceptions and attributes of current educational leaders, connected to the embedded associations within this realm. Worth discussing is the relationship between current leadership cultures and the progression of black women in and aspiring towards these positions of headship (Bryson & Crosby, 1992; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; Marshall et al., 2010).

Through this study, I seek to shed light on the relevance of educational leadership cultures, the current conversation regarding diversification, and the move towards increasing representation in this specific context. For this reason, it was important to examine the perceptions of these black women who lead, regarding the cultures of leadership within the educational system. It was my intention, in doing so, to investigate the role these perceptions play in impacting the path of black women in educational leadership. This work included my role, as researcher, in creating a space in which these participants – black women who lead – were able to reflect upon and share their own firsthand accounts.

My effort was twofold: Firstly, by identifying positive structures, those in which leadership opportunities are fostered and encouraged for black women, the implications include conversations around increasing diversity and inclusivity in these cultures and systems. Secondly, it is important to detect ineffectual cultures, including those possessing leadership behaviors that do not take collective expectations of subordinates into account (Sack, 1986). My

objective is to promote the development of action plans and recommendations for strategic improvement. Finally, it was an objective of this study to discuss and contribute to the ongoing work to reduce the equitable leadership gap. Drawing from prior, historical cultures in educational leadership while simultaneously examining the impacts of significant structural and technological changes (Barker, 1994), this study sought to connect these elements for the purpose of gaining valuable insight (Murphy, 1999; Ortiz, 1982; Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Theoharis, 2007). This remains a necessary step in establishing the building blocks for current and prospective educators who are striving towards and navigating through leadership cultures.

Implications and Recommendations

According to Nee-Benham, Maenette, and Cooper (1998), "A neglected area in school leadership research is that of minority women's leadership" (p. 174). Based on the data collected from the four women who participated in this study, this study can serve as an outlet for the expression of their lives and leadership experiences. For this reason, this study marks an effort on my part to facilitate the convergence of social justice and diversity in the realm of education leadership (O'Connor, 2010). Similar to the work of Sherman, Beaty, Crum, and Peters (2010), this study adds to the existing research on the experiences of women – and especially women of color – in leadership spaces.

Alston (2012) asserts:

> Often in the field of leadership preparation and leadership studies, the voices of the marginalized are not heard in the discussion or teaching of leadership theories, concepts, and research in general. Thus, it is a slanted view of the concept. Therefore, in order to bring some balance to the field, the perspectives, experiences, and voices of Black women leaders are essential to the study of leadership. (p. 127)

According to Alston (2012), in this context of "preparation, practice, and research, a few cornerstones of leadership (power, control, authority, and influence) have historically been used in a negative fashion to marginalize, silence, and erase the accomplishments of historically underrepresented groups" (p. 127). In response to Alston's stance, this work was my effort to bring to the forefront the relevant conversation regarding this new generation of Black women; scholars who are educated, primed, and ready to take the helm and advance the realm of educational leadership.

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2010) found that "despite disparities in hiring, women do aspire to careers in educational leadership. Based on credential and certification, women of color were more likely to be prepared to assume top-level positions" (p. 30). Further, examining the number of educational degrees earned by gender shows "female dominance at all levels… Women earned 78.7% of bachelor's, 77.3% of master's, and 67.5% of doctoral degrees… [further examination] by sex and ethnicity indicated that for every ethnic group, females earn more doctoral degrees than males" (p. 30). Given Alston's (2012) assertion that "African-American women's leadership experiences and 'herstories' are absent from the leadership canon" (p. 127), this study seeks to add to the research regarding the experiences of black women who lead at the highest levels within the education sphere.

Brunner and Grogan (2007) conducted a study in conjunction with the American Association of School Administrators (AASPA) in which they provided a historical overview of women in top leadership positions. In this study, Brunner and Grogan (2007) profiled a number of women atop the school system pyramid, examining the factors that drive some women educators to accept the challenge of top-level leadership while others to remain in middle management. They found that (1) white males make up approximately 85% of top-level

leadership positions within the educational sphere, and (2) most published research related to educational leadership has failed to examine the voices of female leaders. According to Brunner and Grogan (2007), this comprehensive book is the only large national study entirely dedicated to women's leadership. This study, connectedly, seeks to add to the literature relevant to the successful navigation of women in top leadership positions.

Studying women's experiences with a district-based aspiring leaders' program, Sherman (2005) found that "the various needs of a diverse population of aspiring administrators have not been effectively met. Women, although they clearly seek leadership positions, have been constrained by traditional norms surrounding educational administration in the district" (p. 707). Finally, Peters (2011) noted that there is a "silence in research regarding the experiences of Black women faculty in the field of educational leadership/administration. The field of leadership is written typically by and for a mainstream, masculine audience. To this end, women and African Americans are and continue to be 'othered'" (p. 147) in this conversation.

The above-listed bodies of work and this study indicate that there are present, barriers that exist within the educational leadership sphere. An important first step to impacting change is to first recognize that these inequities do exist. This is paramount because only then can true and lasting change – increasing diversity, promoting positive and inclusive leadership cultures – occur. Given this clear lack of empirical, relevant research in this arena, recommendations include the establishment of more research studies related to the development and advancement of women, women of color in particular, within the scope of educational leadership.

CONCLUSION

> I believe Newcomb and Mansfield (2014) put it best when they penned this memoir: The only storylines from our history that we were exposed to in our K-12 schooling were that of enslavement, segregation, and Dr. Martin Luther King... Black women beyond Rosa Parks getting on the bus were portrayed as tertiary, not necessarily instrumental to pivotal moments in our history. Now that we are greater architects of our own knowledge and have found epistemologies that better align with our experiences as young Black women, we have come to realize that activism is very much a part of our history and is an innate component of our moral core. (p. xiv)

Activism remains a relevant component of the day-to-day, lived experiences of black women as a collective. Imbedded within the very fiber of our beings, the intersection of epistemologies (research and theory) to social action and engagement are critical in advancing the historical literature, building a current and relevant knowledge base, creating equitable cultures for underrepresented communities, and developing best-practices for reform. Encompassed in the creed of the activist is a commitment to equity, inclusion, diversity, and 'justice for all'.

As it is applicable within the leadership sphere, activism is persistently and directly relevant to the tenets entrenched within socially just leadership (Anderson, 2009; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Selsky, 1991; Theoharis, 2007). For this reason, it has been the intent of this study to shed light on the factors connected to the increased representation of black women in administrative and managerial capacities. My goal remains to further the work involved in deliberately and explicitly promoting the values of equitability and justice (McCall, 2005; Pignatelli, 1993; Richardson & Loubier, 2008).

This connection of two frames (critical race feminist theory juxtaposed with social justice leadership theory) has served as a precursor to the selection of a high-quality group of participants. For the purpose of this study, this includes one executive, two directors, and one CEO of two LLCs. This intersection of multiple frameworks is a fundamental first step in bridging the gaps that exist in the current literature. The nature of the research study (phenomenological) provides a specific focus – examining the relived experiences of these four black women, all holding top-level positions in educational leadership. Informed consent, coupled with the appropriate data collection protocols, continue to promote the dependability, validity, and verity of this work. Finally, I have sought to deliberately uphold credibility and trustworthiness by working to employ proper and ethical organization of data collection and analysis strategies throughout the course of this study.

Taken together, this work marks my effort to identify and discuss:

1. The intersecting identities of four select black women in the highest positions of leadership within the realm of education,
2. The complexities of these women's experiences as they navigated their leadership paths (including the successes and barriers that are unique to them as black women), and
3. These women's perceptions regarding current educational leadership cultures and structures (including matters relevant to equity, identity, and intersectionality).

My objective was to shed light on the pertinent factors relevant to the increased representation of black women in administrative and managerial capacities. The connected, emergent themes, highlight the need for all members of the constituency to actively engage in conversations around intersectionality and the importance of shifting the current single-track leadership paradigm.

This discourse, again, is especially relevant to and for black women, considering the incongruence between their heightened levels of educational attainment (Davidson & Burke, 2000; Eagly & Carli, 2007) compared to their current status within the organizational leadership sphere (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). This work, then, bears significance in that it is directly relevant to the tenets entrenched within socially just, fully representative leadership (Anderson, 2009; Selsky, 1991). My purpose, in doing so, is to further the work involved in deliberately and explicitly promoting the values of equitability and justice (McCall, 2005; Pignatelli, 1993; Rawls, 2009).

Increasing the representation of qualified black women in positions of educational administration and management is a necessary component of this conversation. Correlated with the education, understanding, cultivation, and development of all members of the constituency – including the advancement of black women in leadership – this work seeks to directly address matters such as equity, fairness, and the role of social justice leaders in overtly supporting and promoting these values (Murphy, 1999; Pratt-Clarke & Maes, 2017). As such, it remains my supposition that what is necessary, and what is good, is socially just leadership.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Georgia State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Mail: P.O. Box 3999
Atlanta, Georgia
30302-3999
In Person:58 Edgewood
3rd Floor

Phone: 404-413-3500
Fax: 404-413-3504

August 30, 2018

Principal Investigator: Janice Fournillier

Key Personnel: Curlette, William; Fournillier, Janice; Johnson, Natasha N

Study Department: Educational Policy Studies

Study Title: Writing HERstory: Examining the Intersectional Identities of Black Women in Educational
Leadership

Review Type: Expedited, 6, 7

IRB Number: H19038

Reference Number: 350496

Approval Date:
08/29/2018
Expiration Date:
08/28/2019

The Georgia State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the above referenced study in accordance with 45 CFR 46.111. The IRB has reviewed and approved the study and any informed consent forms, recruitment materials, and other research materials that are marked as approved in the application. The approval period is listed above. Research that has been approved by the IRB may be subject to further appropriate review and approval or disapproval by officials of the Institution.

Federal regulations require researchers to follow specific procedures in a timely manner. For the protection of all concerned, the IRB calls your attention to the following obligations that you have as Principal Investigator of this study.

1. For any changes to the study (except to protect the safety of participants), an Amendment Application must be submitted to the IRB. The Amendment Application must be reviewed and approved before any changes can take place

2. Any unanticipated/adverse events or problems occurring as a result of participation in this study must be reported immediately to the IRB using the Unanticipated/Adverse Event Form.

3. Principal investigators are responsible for ensuring that informed consent is properly documented in accordance with 45 CFR 46.116.

   < The Informed Consent Form (ICF) used must be the one reviewed and approved by the IRB with the approval dates stamped on each page.

4. For any research that is conducted beyond the approval period, a Renewal Application must be submitted at least 30 days prior to the expiration date. The Renewal Application must be approved by the IRB before the expiration date else automatic termination of this study will occur. If the study expires, all research activities associated with the study must cease and a new application must be approved before any work can continue.

5. When the study is completed, a Study Closure Report must be submitted to the IRB.

All of the above referenced forms are available online at http://protocol.gsu.edu. Please do not hesitate to contact the Office of Research Integrity (404-413-3500) if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Catherine Chang, IRB Member

Appendix B

Participant Study Invitation Letter

Fall 2018

Natasha N. Johnson, Student Principal Investigator
Georgia State University College of Education and Human Development
Department of Educational Policy Studies
30 Pryor St. SW, Suite 450
Atlanta, GA 30303

Dear <Name>,

I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to participate in a research study about the lived experiences of black women in Educational Leadership. You have been selected based on your role as a leader in the educational sphere. This research study is phenomenological in nature, and it is being conducted for the purposes of my doctoral thesis/dissertation at Georgia State University.

Research studies are conducted in the effort to answer an important question.
The question guiding the course of this study is:

> *How have the racial and gender identities of black women informed their educational and professional experiences in and on the path to leadership?*

This study is an exploration into the black-woman-leadership phenomenon, especially as it is manifested within educational institutions and settings. It is particularly relevant for black women, considering the incongruence that lies between their heightened levels of educational attainment as compared to their generally lower status within the organizational pecking order. Implications derived from these findings include the need to build relevant connections to and for black women who serve in and aspire towards careers in educational leadership.

This is a necessary first step in establishing the collective identity of black women, building equitable leadership cultures, and addressing intersectionality. By gathering this information, it is my goal, as researcher, to further the work in developing effective, equitable organizational leadership-based strategies by gathering necessary, pertinent data from this group of participants.

Taking part in research is always optional. You have been purposively selected to participate in this study given that you are:

- Black/African American
- Female
- An executive-level leader in the educational realm

In the event that you do decide to take part in the study, thank you!

Together, we will:

- Review the study with you at the downtown Georgia State University campus. This will occur on a day and time that are most convenient for you.

- Through this study, we will address the following question:
  How have the racial and gender identities of black women informed their educational and professional experiences in and on the path to leadership?

This will take place through a 3-round series of interviews (3 interviews, 60 minutes each).

[COSTS]
There is no cost to participate in the study.

[CONSENT FORM]
A consent form is included; it explains the research study in detail. Please read this and feel free to forward all inquiries to the principal investigator - contact information is included in this form.

If we have not heard from you within two weeks, a member of our research team will send you a follow-up email. You will then be asked, at that time, to confirm your willingness to participate as a member of this study.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions as you read over this material. We are happy to review any of this with you and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to speak with the lead researcher, please call Dr. Janice B. Fournillier, Ph.D., Principal Investigator, at 404-413-8262 or jfournillier@gsu.edu.

[IN SUM]
Thank you for your time and attention to this letter. Again, taking part in research is voluntary. You may choose not to take part. If you decide not to take part in this study, please feel free to document that in your reply.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to this research study.

Sincerely,

Natasha N. Johnson

Natasha N. Johnson, Student Principal Investigator
Doctoral Candidate & Graduate Teaching Assistant
Department of Educational Policy Studies
Georgia State University College of Education & Human Development

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Georgia State University
Department of Educational Policy Studies
Informed Consent

Title: Writing HERstory: Examining the Intersectional Identities of Black Women in Educational Leadership
Principal Investigator: Janice B. Fournillier, Ph.D.
Student Principal Investigator: Natasha N. Johnson

I. Purpose:
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to examine the intersectional identities of black women on their paths to educational leadership positions. You are invited to participate because you are a black woman in a top-level leadership position in the field of education within the United States. A total of four participants will be recruited for this study. Your participation will require approximately three total hours of your time.

II. Procedures:
If you decide to participate, you will complete three 60-minute interview sessions. As this is a phenomenology, you will be asked to share your experiences as a black woman in and en route to your current role as an educational leader. Each interview session will be audio and/or video recorded. These sessions will be held in-person at the Georgia State University campus located in downtown Atlanta. All interviews will take place during the Fall 2018 – Spring 2019 academic calendar year.

III. Risks:
In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:
Participation in this study may not benefit you personally; however, there are positive professional implications. The findings of this research have the potential to provide rich evidence regarding the roles of race and gender on black women in their journeys toward top-tier educational leadership positions. Overall, we hope to gain information about the role of intersectionality on educational leaders and educational leadership cultures. Participants will witness the development of implications and recommendations for the creation of equitable and just educational leadership structures and cultures. Continued benefits of this study include improved school leadership practices for the purpose of advancing policy, research, and theory development in this regard.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:
Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

VII. Confidentiality:
We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. The researchers (Janice B. Fournillier, Ph.D. – Principal Investigator and Natasha N. Johnson – Student Principal Investigator) will have direct access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). The researchers will use a pseudonym rather than your name on study records. Completed interview audio and video files will be stored in the researcher's password- and firewall-protected computer. Only a cumulative summary of the collected data will be reported (emergent themes). Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when this study's results are presented or published. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally. All study data will be destroyed three years after study closure.

VIII. Contact Persons:
Contact Janice B. Fournillier, Ph.D., Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at Georgia State University at 404-413-8262 or jfournillier@gsu.edu and/or Natasha N. Johnson, Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at Georgia State University at 404-860-3272 or njohnson93@student.gsu.edu:

- If you have questions about the study or your part in it
- If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study
- If you think you have been harmed by the study

In the event that you wish to speak to an objective party, contact the GSU Office of Human Research Protections at 404-413-3500 or irb@gsu.edu:

- If you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team
    - If you have questions about your rights as a research participant
- If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research

You can talk about questions and/or concerns, offer input, obtain information, or offer suggestions about the study. You can also call the GSU Office of Human Research Protections if you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study.

IX. Copy of Consent Form to Participant:
You will receive a copy of the consent form for your own records.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio and/or video recorded, please indicate your consent by signing below.

Thank you.

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

_____ _____
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent Date

IRB NUMBER: H19038
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 08/29/2018
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 08/28/2019

Appendix D

Interview Guides

Georgia State University
Department of Educational Policy Studies
Interview Guides

Principal Investigator: Janice B. Fournillier, Ph.D.
Student Principal Investigator: Natasha N. Johnson

Organization of this Interview Guide

This interview guide serves to address the following research question:

> *How have the racial and gender identities of black women informed their educational and professional experiences in and on the path to leadership?*

The open-ended questions below afford both the participant and the researcher the opportunity to engage in dialogue that is fluid and organic. This interview guide is designed to cover/address all of the below-listed questions over the course of three 60-minute interview sessions.

Instructions

Greetings!
My name is Natasha N. Johnson; thank you again for agreeing to serve as a participant for my dissertation research:

> *Writing HERstory: Examining the Intersectional Identities of Black Women in Educational Leadership.*

This study is phenomenological in nature. As such, it is an exploration into the black-woman-leadership phenomenon, especially as it is manifested within the educational realm.

Thank you for your commitment to sharing your in-depth descriptions regarding your lived experiences as a black woman in and en route to your current role as an educational leader.

With your assistance, I seek to uncover and highlight the following research question:

> *How have the racial and gender identities of black women informed their educational and professional experiences in and on the path to leadership?*

Each interview session will be 60-minutes in length.

Recording Instructions

Thank you!

Your signature on the enclosed consent form confirms your consent to being audio and/or video recorded for the purposes of this research. These recordings will only be utilized to capture all relevant details in real-time while affording me the opportunity to remain attentive in my conversations and interactions with you.

In keeping with confidentiality, only the study researchers will be privy to these recordings. The student principal investigator will transcribe the interview; at that time, I will provide you with a copy of the transcription for the purpose of verifying document accuracy.

Begin Digital Recording

Date: Time:

Interviewee Pseudonym:

Georgia State University
Department of Educational Policy Studies
Interview Guides

Title: Writing HERstory: Examining the Intersectional Identities of Black Women in Educational Leadership
Principal Investigator: Janice B. Fournillier, Ph.D.
Student Principal Investigator: Natasha N. Johnson

Guiding Questions/Prompts

1. Please tell me about your personal background.
2. Please tell me about your professional background.
3. Please tell me about your qualifications.
4. Please tell me about your support/accountability system.

Based on the overarching research question:

How have the racial and gender identities of black women informed their educational and professional experiences in and on the path to leadership?

5. What impacted your decision to become a leader within the educational sphere?
6. Describe your experiences as an educational leader.
    a. How do you perceive yourself as a leader in education?
    b. How do you believe your experiences to be unique as a black woman in educational leadership?
    c. How do your experiences impact your daily role and responsibilities as an educational leader?
    d. What life experiences have equipped you with the tools necessary to be an effective educational leader?
7. How do you believe others perceive you as a leader in education?
8. Tell me about the following:
    a. Some of the personal/professional successes you have experienced on your path to educational leadership.
    b. Some of the personal/professional barriers you have encountered on your path to educational leadership.
    c. How have these successes and barriers informed your path/journey?

9. Tell me about the following:
    a. Some of the personal/professional successes you have experienced in your role as an educational leader.
    b. Some of the personal/professional barriers you have encountered in your role as an educational leader.
    c. How have and do these successes and barriers informed your current role?
10. What factors do you believe can, should, and do contribute to the number of black women in educational leadership?
11. What challenges do you believe face black women aspiring towards careers as educational leaders?
12. What strategies for success have been shared with you along the way?
13. What advice/strategies for success do you have for black women aspiring towards careers in educational leadership?
14. What concluding remarks do you have for those seeking to more fully capture the experiences of black women serving in and aspiring towards careers in educational leadership?

Appendix E

Data Collection Chart

Interview Number	Pseudonym	Date	Interview Time	Transcription Time (avg.)	Number of Pages transcribed[13]
1	Annie Corene	Sept. 20, 2018	60:00	c. 10 hours	16
2	Annie Corene	Oct. 15, 2018	60:00	c. 8 hours	16
3	Annie Corene	Nov. 28, 2018	60:00	c. 8 hours	15
TOTALS			180 minutes (3 hours)	c. 26 hours	47 pages
DATA COLLECTION – ANNIE C.			29 HOURS		47 PAGES
1	Simone Freeman	Sept. 21, 2018	60:00	c. 10 hours	16
2	Simone Freeman	Oct. 5, 2018	60:00	c. 8 hours	15
3	Simone Freeman	Oct. 19, 2018	60:00	c. 8 hours	16
TOTALS			180 minutes (3 hours)	c. 26 hours	47 pages
DATA COLLECTION – SIMONE F.			29 HOURS		47 PAGES
1	Jacqueline Goldsworth	Sept. 22, 2018	60:00	c. 8 hours	15
2	Jacqueline Goldsworth	Oct. 20, 2018	60:00	c. 8 hours	15
3	Jacqueline Goldsworth	Nov. 3, 2018	60:00	c. 8 hours	14
TOTALS			180 minutes (3 hours)	c. 24 hours	44 pages
DATA COLLECTION – JACQUELINE G.			27 HOURS		44 PAGES

[13] All page references are single spaced

1	**Monique McCallister**	**Oct. 2, 2018**	**60:00**	**c. 8 hours**	**15**
2	**Monique McCallister**	**Oct. 23, 2018**	**60:00**	**c. 8 hours**	**13**
3	**Monique McCallister**	**Nov. 13, 2018**	**60:00**	**c. 8 hours**	**12**
TOTALS			**180 minutes (3 hours)**		**40 pages**
DATA COLLECTION – MONIQUE M.			**27 HOURS**		**40 PAGES**
TOTAL TIME (ALL PARTICIPANTS)			**720 minutes (12 hours)**	**112 hours**	**178 pages**

TOTAL TIME (ALL PARTICIPANTS)	**108 HOURS**
TOTAL # OF PAGES TRANSCRIBED	**178 PAGES**

Appendix F

Thank You Letter to Study Participants

December 2018

Good afternoon _____,

Thank you SO much for participating in this study!

I knew this work would be important to me, but little did I know the impact that this would truly make - not just to/for us, but for the betterment of the whole educational sphere!

Every time I mention, to anyone, the concept of 'bringing a microphone' to the voices of black women in ed. leadership, I get people's wow faces in response, lol!

I am truly heartened to know that you got as much as you did out of our sessions. OF COURSE, I find your input to be INVALUABLE. You are in a unique position where you are based in a _____ setting, working with _____ who are primarily _____, while building/creating partnerships with external entities.

I mean, who else can provide insights regarding ALL of those levels of interaction??
Really - thanks again for EVERYTHING.

Attached to this message are the following items:

(1) I took it back to the beginning - here is the YouTube video of my 3MT presentation at GSU back in March 2018: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=thKveB-SyTw (Natasha Johnson's Three Minute Thesis Competition Presentation)

(2) The interview guides - these are the questions you were asked over the course of our 3, 60-minute interview sessions, and

(3) Lastly, the full unedited transcript is also attached.

Thanks, and I wish you and yours a very happy, healthy, and blessed holiday season!

Best regards,

Natasha N. Johnson

Natasha Johnson, Doctoral Candidate
Educational Leadership, Department of Educational Policy Studies
College of Education and Human Development
Georgia State University